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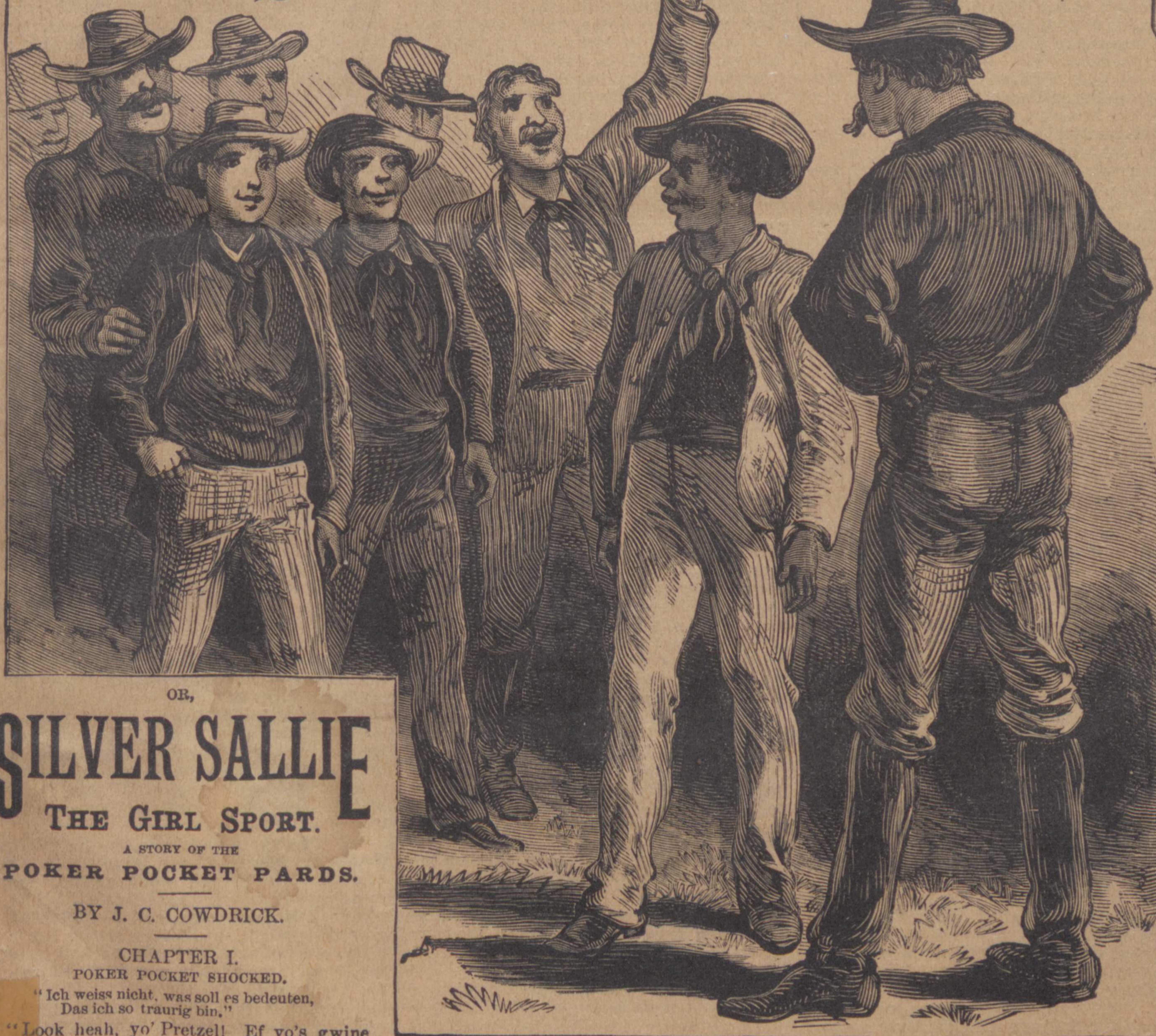
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Paddy's Trump Card;



OR,

SILVER SALLIE THE GIRL SPORT.

A STORY OF THE
POKER POCKET PARDS.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

CHAPTER I.

POKER POCKET SHOCKED.

"Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten,
Das ich so traurig bin."

"Look heah, yo' Pretzell! Ef yo's gwine
ing, yo' want to sing in plain United States

"THREE CHEERS FOR THE QUAIN'T PARDS OF POKER POCKET!"

of America, or else keep yo' head shet tighter'n a lockup!"

"Thot's phwat's dhe matter, Pomp! We don't want no Dutch, do we? If ye can't sing it in United States, I've it alone, begob! Call him down every toime he opens his yaup, Pompey!"

"Yo' jes' bet I will, Paddy! What does it mean, anyhow, Pretzel? Yo' is all d'e time bu'stin' out wi'd d'at d'ar' song, an' nobody kin tell what yo' say. D'ar' ain't no sense in any sech lingo. What is yo' tryin' to git fru' yo', anyhow? What am it?"

"Ich weiss nicht—"

"Now, d'ar' yo' goes ergain! We kayn't onderstand et no better in speak 'n we kin in sing, yo' sourcrouter!"

"Thot's right, Pompey! Call him down every toime! Whin ye kin spake loke Pomp and me, Pretzel, dhen it will be toime enough fur ye to be blowin' av yure bazoo around here, d'ye moind."

"Donnerwetter! V'at for ein paar shackasses you vas, anyhow? Id vas no use try to get anydings into your t'ick heads! Pomp's wool was so tight d'ot even d'e louses couldn't git t'rough, maype, und your own vas so red d'ot ideas vould purn oop pefore d'ey could get in!"

"Take thot back, Pretzel, or Oi'm a gossoon av Oi don't paste ye wan on dhe nose!"

"An' I'll finish d'e job whar' Paddy leaves off, shua!"

But there was no danger of a fight, for all three were laughing, and the threats were meaningless.

Three better friends than these three pards of Poker Pocket never lived. They were like brothers, almost, though as widely different in looks and broken language as nature could well have made them.

They were about the same size and age, and three as jolly and rollicking lads as could be scared up anywhere. Pompey Sunflower was as black as the ace of spades, Paddy McCrum had hair of the fieriest red and a rusty complexion, and Bartholomaeus Pretzel had a face as round as a Dutch dumpling.

His first name being altogether too long and unwieldy for every-day use, the Dutch boy was known by his surname instead, which was easier to get at and a good deal more familiar to most people.

Poker Pocket was a live mining-camp of the wild Southwest.

At the time of which we write, it was enjoying a boom, and had a big population of the most cosmopolitan sort imaginable.

The camp was located at the bottom of a gulch where a prospector had made the discovery of a pocket containing several nuggets of gold almost as large as fair-sized potatoes.

Unable to keep his find to himself, all the discoverer ever got out of it was a price for the nuggets mentioned. That he squandered rapidly in riotous living, and when he returned to the scene of his discovery—lo! a young city had sprung up, every rod of ground had been taken, and he was not "in it."

There was no help for it; he had to go to work at so much per diem, like hundreds of others, where he might have been master of all he surveyed if he had only exercised a little horse sense in the beginning. There he was, however; there was no redress, and Sidney Sullivan had become a morose and sullen man, feeling that he had a grievance.

Only one consolation was left to him, if such it could be called, for it was a constant reminder of his lack of foresight, and that was the big mine of the camp, the one that was the backbone of the whole diggings, which had been named after him. "Sullivan's Snap" it was called, and a snap for Sullivan it might have been if

he had only managed things aright when he first made his discovery. But that time had gone by; the present was what nagged Sullivan.

It was early morning at Poker Pocket.

The miners had gone to their work, the regular business of the day was going on, and the camp was about as orderly and quiet as it could ever be found.

Paddy and Pomp, taking a walk in the direction of Sullivan's Snap, had come suddenly face to face with Pretzel as they rounded the corner of a building where they had to turn, and Pretzel was just breaking forth into song.

Pomp immediately interrupted the singer, when followed the brief dialogue we have set forth. More came after, which we will not quote, and the trio of pards were about moving on when a man approached them from the direction of the mine, muttering to himself.

One glance showed them that it was Sullivan.

"Hillo! phwat's dhe matther wi'd Sid Sullivan dhis marnin'?" exclaimed Paddy to the others.

"I gibs it up," said Pomp, in response. "Mebby he has tookin' to cryin' ober his hard luck ergain, an' will go down an' git rip-stavin' drunk to spite somebody."

"He vas ein gosh-for-plame fool for d'ot!" cried Pretzel. "Who git d'e worst of d'ot, maype? He spend his money, lose his pay at der mine, maype get some plack eye if he don't watch owdt; und d'en who have to carry d'e big head to-morrow, ain'dt id, py shimminy!"

Just then Sullivan came up.

"Phwat's dhe matther wi'd ye?" inquired Paddy, in sympathetic tone.

"Matter enough," Sullivan growled. "I am after leaving old Greenbough, and have read off me mind to him!"

"Dhen it is out av a job ye are?"

"Yes, and not a bit sorry, either. Why should I be working fer wages in a mine that would be all me own if I had me rights? That dude of a Cutter thought he could run me!"

The man turned and shook his fist at the mine in his rage.

"Hit ain' no funeral ob mine," chipped in Pomp, "but it 'pears to me like yo' cut off yo' nose to spite yo' own face d'is time."

"Do you think I could stand it?" roared Sullivan. "That dude of a super a-tellin' me that I was laggin' back and not doin' a day's work, when every foot of all this ground could 'a' been mine as well as not? By Heavens! flesh and blood can't stand it!"

"V'at you peen goin' to do apout id?" queried Pretzel, in perhaps a slightly taunting tone. "Id vas pooty late to sot down und eried, y'en der milk was all gone to py-gosh all ofer der ground, ain'dt id, maype?"

"What am I going to do about it?" in a loud tone of voice. "I will show them what I am going to do about it, curse them! I will get even with them both, that is what I'll do about it!" shaking his fist in the direction of the mine more vindictively than before.

"Ye had better I've bad enough alone, Sullivan," Paddy advised. "Phwat can ye do wi'd such a man as Mither Greenbough to buck against? And he is in dhe roight, anyhow—"

"In the right? Do you go back on me like that, Paddy? Yes, I'll leave them alone, curse 'em!"

Once more shaking his fist at the mine with even more vengeful force, the man strode on his way, leaving the pards looking after him.

They saw him going in the direction of the mine-owner's house, shaking his fists and talking to himself as he went, and

they turned and resumed their walk to the mines.

"Oi have felt it in me bones dhat he wouldn't monkey long wi'd dhat man Cutter," observed Paddy.

"Might 'a' knowed he would done git it up d'e back, ef he kep' on a foolin' wi'd him," remarked Pomp.

"He vas a fool at first, und now he peen a fool some more already," capped off Pretzel.

Paddy and Pomp performed the errand that had taken them to the mines, and were just setting out for the camp proper on their return, Pretzel with them, when wild cries fell upon their ears.

Looking in the direction whence the cries came, they saw women running toward the mines from Greenbough's house, waving their arms and calling loudly as they came, and Paddy, taking it for granted that it was Mr. Greenbough that was wanted, took up the cry.

Frederick Greenbough and his superintendent, Edwin Cutter, came hurrying out from the mine office, demanding to know what was the matter.

"Oi don't know phwat it is, sor," cried Paddy, "but somet'ing has broke loose, sure enough!"

It was perhaps an eighth of a mile from the mine to the camp, and the mine-owner's house was a little nearer than that.

By this time the women could be recognized as servants of the house, and their faces were filled with horror. Whatever had happened, it was clearly something unusual.

"What is it?" shouted Greenbough, running forward to meet them. "Why in the mischief don't you say what is the matter, instead of yelling like that? What has happened, I demand? What is it?"

"Your — your — daughter!" pantingly cried the foremost of the servants, out of breath. "She has—has—been murdered, sir! Oh! oh! Come at once, sir!"

Mr. Greenbough pressed his hand to his forehead and fairly staggered.

"Sid Sullivan's work!" he was heard to mutter.

CHAPTER II.

TERRIBLY ACCUSED.

Poker Pocket was shocked, indeed!

The pride of the Pocket was Laura Greenbough, the mine-manager's only child.

A girl about twenty years of age, she was as good as she was beautiful, and was beloved by everybody. She was the promised wife of Edwin Cutter, the mine superintendent.

Cutter was as deeply overcome as Greenbough on hearing the terrible report. In fact, every man who heard the excited woman's words blanched to the lips, and all looked at one another as they recalled the words Sid Sullivan had uttered on leaving the mine.

On the previous night the superintendent had reported to Greenbough that he could no longer put up with Sullivan as an employee at the Sullivan's Snap. It had been by Greenbough's especial request that he had been retained thus long, and behind that had been the pleading of the manager's daughter, who felt that there was at least some justice in the prospector's priority claim.

Cutter's report had been to the effect that either the man must leave the mines at once, or he himself would resign. He was impudent, felt that Cutter had no power to discharge him, and his influence was demoralizing to some of the other men. Accordingly, Greenbough had gone to the mine early that morning, Sullivan had been called into the office, and there had been told that he could no longer be retained as an employee of the Sullivan's

Snap. Sullivan had thereupon raved, and he left the office with dire threats upon his lips.

No wonder, then, that Mr. Greenbough's first thought was against him.

"Great heavens!" cried Cutter, as he heard the report. "It cannot be! It is impossible! There must be some mistake!"

"No! no! It is true—true!" cried the servant. "She was sitting by a window and some one came up and stabbed her in the back. We heard her scream, and when we got to her she was lying on the floor."

"And you saw no one?" demanded Cutter.

"Yes, we saw Sid Sullivan just entering his cabin, and he closed the door after him with a bang."

Cutter had barely paused to hear this.

"Come, Mr. Greenbough!" he cried. "We must catch that fellow before he can get away into the hills. I would not have believed him capable of such a deed as this; I can hardly believe it now."

"But you know what he threatened," reminded Mr. Greenbough. "He said he would strike us both a blow that we would feel, and, God knows, that he has done it! Who could have thought of Laura in connection with his threats? My God! my heart will break!"

Mr. Greenbough covered his face with his hands and reeled like a drunken man.

"Back to the house, you women!" ordered Cutter. "You, Jim, go for the doctor as fast as you can go! The rest of you come with me, and we'll make sure of Sid Sullivan before he has time to get away. If he has done this thing, he shall answer for it with his life!"

Some one had called the men from the mines, and they were running to the spot, some having already reached there.

These raised a shout in approval of Cutter's last words.

"By ther 'ternal, I can't believe that Sid Sullivan has done sech a thing as that!" cried one Bill Crawford.

He was a large man, with a heavy mustache, a general favorite among the men of the mine. He was known as Big Bill.

"He made threats, Bill," said Cutter, "and we must make sure of him."

"I ain't sayin' nothin' 'gainst that," Big Bill rejoined. "I am with ye to arrest him, but I want ther dead sure proof before he is hanged."

"There must be that, certainly."

They hastened off in the direction of Sullivan's cabin, or shanty, and Mr. Greenbough followed the servants in the direction of his house. Most of the men followed Cutter and Big Bill.

The three pards stood for a moment looking at one another.

Pain and grief were plainly stamped upon each face, for they had liked Miss Greenbough and would have suffered anything for her.

"Et don't seem possible d'at d'e missy am dead," said Pomp, hoarsely.

"Py shimminy! it can't peen so!" cried Pretzel.

"Oi am afraid dhere is no mistake about it," accepted Paddy. "Dhe wimmin wouldn't come a screamin' dhat way fur nothin'."

"D'at am d'e fack," agreed Pomp. "But, 'fo' de good Lawd, I can't believe d'at Sid Sullivan done it, 'deed I can't. He done liked Missy Laura; I'se heard him say so."

"Donnerwetter, no!" cried Pretzel. "He vas ein great peeg shackass apoudt d'ot mines, und he vould git him his pelly full mit pad whisky und plow off steam all around and make a creat peeg noise, but he vas not so pad as dot!"

"D'at am what I fink, too," agreed Pomp. "I kayn't believe d'at he could do a f'ing like d'at, nohow. Big Bill don't

believe et, an' yo' have to own d'at he am a man ob hoss sense, ebery time."

"Begorra, it is roight ye are, Oi do believe!" cried Paddy. "Av he didn't do it, dhen somebody else did, and it is fur us to foind out who it was and round him up. Come, let's folley dhe men to dhe shanty!"

And away they ran, and, being swift of foot, they reached Sullivan's cabin about as soon as those who had started first.

Big Bill was in the lead, with a revolver in his hand.

At his heels was Cutter, similarly armed, and with him a score or more of the men from the mine.

Big Bill tried the door immediately, but found it locked, and he gave a resounding rap upon it with the butt of his revolver, at the same time calling upon Sullivan to open up.

A growl was heard within, and in a moment the door was unfastened and opened.

Sullivan was drying his hands and face upon a coarse towel, and at sight of the armed men, and the crowd behind them, he turned pale.

"What is ther matter now?" he demanded. "Have I stole anything from ye? Do ye want the nuggets that I found when I first discovered the place that is makin' ye rich?"

"We want you," said Big Bill.

"Ye want me! What for?"

"Let me ask a question," put in Cutter. "What have you been washing for, Sid? You did not go to work, and consequently was not very dirty."

"That is none of your business," answered the suspected man. "If I wasn't goin' to work I was goin' to dress up, and I don't know of no law to prevent a man from washin' when he pleases, do you?"

"No, I don't. I thought maybe you had another reason for washing."

"Say, what 'n thunder does this mean?" Sullivan roared.

"It means that you are a prisoner, Sid," answered Big Bill. "You are suspected of a murder."

"Murder?" with surprise. "Who has been killed?"

"Laura Greenbough."

"Good God! And you think that Sid Sullivan would 'a' done a thing like that? Ye must be crazy!"

"Then you did not do it?"

"Do it! Big Bill, you know me better'n that."

"Well, I thought I did, but they tell me you made some awful threats at the mine."

"What if I did? I didn't make no threats against that angel, did I? Now, if it had been you that was killed, Ed Cutter, then there might be some sense in suspectin' me, fer I hate ye wuss'n pizen."

"I know you have no love for me, Sid, but it was all your own fault."

"Oh! et is, is et? Mebby you—"

"None of this," cried Big Bill. "This ain't to the p'int. You will have to give in, Sid; but I don't believe you guilty, all the same, and I will make it my business to find out who did the crime, if it is in me. Git on ye'r hat and coat and come with us."

At these words the accused man trembled like a leaf, and his face was like death itself. He seemed ready to fall to the floor, but managed to pull himself together by a mighty effort of will. The other saw this, watching him narrowly, and Cutter's suspicions were somewhat strengthened.

CHAPTER III.

PADDY AND PARDS.

"By Heaven! I am innocent!"

Thus Sullivan exploded, as soon as he regained his grip.

"I hope you are, sir," spoke up Cutter. "I hope you will be able to prove it, if you are."

"I needn't hope fer any help from you ter do et," Sullivan growled. "You will put the rope around my neck ef et's possible. But I swear that I know nothin' about et!"

"You greatly mistake, sir," declared the superintendent. "I shall put nothing in your way. All I am after is the truth, for the slayer of my promised wife shall have no mercy shown him, once we are assured of his guilt. I hope you can prove your assertion, most solemnly I do!"

"Sid, do ye swear to me that ye are innocent?" demanded Big Bill.

"I do, Bill, 'fore God I do!"

"That is enough, then. I'll work night an' day fer ye, if proof goes ergainst ye."

"But why did you have the door locked?" asked Cutter.

"It's my usual way, when I go out or come in."

"And what is this on your towel?" taking the coarse towel from his hands as he spoke. "By Heavens! it is blood!"

He indicated some spots on the towel as he held it up to view.

"How came this blood here?" he demanded.

"My nose bled this mornin'," answered the prisoner. "I s'pose it got on then."

"I hope you can prove it," said Cutter, sternly. "Bind him, men, for there is every reason why he should be held until these damaging circumstances can be brushed away."

Sullivan's hands were speedily secured with a piece of rope, and he was rendered helpless.

While that was being done, Cutter looked around the humble place of abode, trying to discover further evidence either for or against the prisoner.

It was a shanty of only one room, with a lean-to in the rear, and stepping out into that, an ejaculation immediately escaped the lips of the superintendent, caused by something he saw there.

On the table lay a bowie-knife, and not far away was the basin in which the prisoner had evidently been washing when the rap came upon the door. The water had been thrown out. Cutter examined the basin closely, and here and there on the upper part of the inside were blood spatters.

Taking up the knife and the basin, he entered the other room and confronted the prisoner with them.

"What mean these things?" he demanded.

"What about 'em?" Sullivan demanded.

Everybody else looked with interest, including the trio of pards, Paddy, Pomp and Pretzel.

"Why was your knife lying on the table out there, wet? And how came this blood in the basin?" the superintendent demanded. "It begins to look worse for you, sir."

"As to ther blood, I told ye that my nose bled this mornin'," answered the prisoner. "And as to ther knife, et dropped out of my belt when I was bendin' over to wash, and I picked et up with my hands wet. That is ther long and ther short and ther hull of et."

"I hope you are telling the truth, and that there will be some way of your proving it," said Cutter. "If you are not, but are guilty, I warn you that it would have been better for you never to have been born. The hand that has robbed me of my promised wife shall perish miserably. I swear it! God help you if you are the man who did this deed."

"All I ask is a fair show," returned the prisoner, pale and anxious.

"And you shall have that," Cutter prom-

ised. "Look after him, boys, and see to it that no chance is given him for escape. I must hasten on to the house and learn the truth."

He had been impatient to get on to the house, and now he ran in that direction without further delay, leaving Big Bill and the others to lock up the shanty and take the prisoner to the lock-up.

Paddy, Pomp and Pretzel had listened to all this without saying anything, save in whispers among themselves.

They now went in the direction of Greenbough's house.

"Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten,
Dass ich so traurig bin;
Ein Märchen aus—"

So Pretzel started to hum softly to himself, but Pomp promptly caught him a resounding whack on the back, that knocked it all out of him in one belch.

"What am d'e mattah wiv' yo'?" Pomp demanded. "What am yo' finkin' erbout, ter go singin' when Missy Greenbough done be dead? Orter be 'shamed ye'self, yo' pore sour crouter, yo'!"

"V'at you t'ink?" exclaimed the injured Pretzel. "Maype you don't knows d'ot songs, ain't id?"

"How yo' 'speck we's eber gwine t' know hit?"

"Shust let me sing him somedimes, und you vill learn him right away gvick, maype. Aber, v'at you t'ink von Sullivan now, some more, alleweil?"

"Begob, Oi still bel'ave him innocent!" asserted Paddy. "It would take a man wi'd a harder heart nor phwat Sid Sullivan has got, to murther Laura Greenbough in cold blood, an' don't you forget it!"

"D'at am what's d'e mattah!" cried Pomp. "He nebber done killed d'e lady, yo' kin jes' bet yo' sweet life he didn't! But, by golly, hit do look consid'ble dubious fo' him, no mistake! But d'at don' mattah; ef Big Bill fink he am innocent, I's gwine vote d'at way too."

"By dhe same token, somebody did dhe dirthy business, all dhe same," reminded Paddy. "Begorra, we must buckle down to dhe work av foindin' out who it was, and bring dhe gossoon to justice! Do yez think we can do it?"

"V'at's der reason, maype, und ve can't?" demanded Pretzel. "Py chimminy! ve vill shust got oop und hump ourselves und goes vor d'ot fellers paldt-headed, you pet! Ve makes him his head to schvimm like he peen shock-voll mit chig-vater und didn't know vhere he vas at alleweil, ain't id? Vell, I guess so!"

"D'at am d'e ticket, Pretzel!" approved Pomp. "Uf yo' could only sing in reg'lar United States lingo d'e same as ye' kin chin it, yo' w'u'd be all right, no mistake; ain' d'at so, Paddy?"

"Thot's phwat it is," Paddy agreed.

The news had spread like wildfire, and by this time the whole camp was in an uproar.

Everybody was running in the direction of Greenbough's house, where a big crowd was already congregated, every person eager and curious to get hold of the facts in the case.

The crowd, for the most part, was in front of the house.

"Come," said Paddy, to his pards, running off at a tangent, "no use our thryin' to get in dhere; we'll go around to dhe back!"

"D'at am d'e bes', I 'pine," agreed Pomp. "Ef we am gwine play defective on d'is case, we wan' ter circumvent d'at crowd an' git in on d'e groun' flo', I reckon. What yo' say, Pretzel?"

"Yaw, d'ot vas all righdt," Pretzel agreed. "Maype ve petter had peen look oudt ve don't blay some shackasses mit ourselves, yust der same, ain't id? I peen all righdt mineself, but I vas not so

sure 'pout you. No matter, Pretzel peen on hand vhen der pell rings!"

"Yis, begorra, we know you are a jack-ass, all right," declared Paddy. "Ye don't have to prove dhat same, Pretzel."

Reaching the rear of the board fence that enclosed the house on the rear, Paddy led the way through a gate there and proceeded to the house, where a few persons who had entered by the same way were standing.

One of these was pointing out to the others one of the windows where, according to his story, the crime had been committed, and was telling just how it must have been done, and the three pards stopped and listened to what he had to say, after which they went forward to that window.

Paddy, perhaps the keenest of the trio, paid close attention to the sill of the window and to the ground beneath. No track could be seen, for it was a hard gravel walk, with a wide border of grass. Upon the latter the assassin had probably walked when approaching his victim; nor could any stain of blood be discovered on the sill. Suddenly, however, the Irish lad stooped and picked up a tiny object out of the grass.

CHAPTER IV.

GOOD NEWS, BUT NO LIGHT.

The young Irishman did not make known to his pards what his find was then, but put it into his pocket.

He looked around still more, as did also the others, but nothing further was to be discovered. So many persons had been moving about by this time, that it was useless to look for tracks or trail.

About that time Mr. Greenbough came out upon the front porch of his cottage and lifted his hand.

All knew that he had something to say, and the crowd was instantly quiet.

"My friends," he said, "I think I have good news for you. My daughter is not dead, and the doctor says there is a fair chance for her recovery—"

"Hurrah!" some fellow broke out, instantly, and such a cheer as went up the camp of Poker Pocket had perhaps never experienced before. It was loud and prolonged, and must have been heard a mile away.

As soon as it ended, Mr. Greenbough said further:

"Yes, she lives; the knife of the assassin did not do the work intended. Nevertheless, I here and now proclaim a reward of two thousand dollars to the man who will discover who that person was, with proof of his guilt, and I will see to it that he gets no second opportunity."

This raised a shout of approval.

"We have already made an arrest, that of Sid Sullivan," Mr. Greenbough went on to say, "but we lack the proof positive that he is the man. He declares that he is innocent; but that he would naturally do, anyhow. I do not want any innocent person to suffer, but once I find out who did this thing, with the proof positive against him, let him look out!"

"That's right, Boss Greenbough!"

"Of course, it is possible that my daughter will be able to tell who it was when she comes to sufficiently to talk; but if not, then it will be work for some one who has detective talent, and there is a fair chance for every man of you to win the reward I have promised. I must know who the person was, and his reason for his cowardly attack upon my child. Until I do know, her life is not safe. Men of Poker Pocket, discover the scoundrel!"

"Hooray!" they yelled, in unison.

"We'll do et or bu'st, boss, you bet!" cried one man.

"D'ot's vhat peen der matter!" echoed

Pretzel. "Ve got dhere efery times, alleweil!"

"D'at am d'e way t' talk, Pretzel," approved Pomp, giving the Dutch boy a slap on the back that almost dislocated his neck. "We am gwine fo' d'at two thousan' dollahs!"

"Begorra, ye can bet yure swate loives we are!" declared Paddy. "Ownly to t'ink av it, w'u'd ye! Two t'ousand dollahs, and only t'ree av us to divvy amongst—By dhe powers, but it is millionaires we are already, d'ye moind? You bet we'll get there, Pomp."

"But how's we gwine t' divide two thousan' 'mongst three?" questioned the dardy.

"Aisy, begob!" declared Paddy. "Oi'll take a t'ousand, you'll take a t'ousand, and thin we'll 'ach give Pretzel fo've hundred and he will have a t'ousand, d'ye moind?"

"Yaw, d'ot vas all righdt," Pretzel quickly agreed.

"What am d'e mattah wiv' yo'?" cried Pomp. "D'at done leab us only five hundred a piece!"

The Irish lad scratched his head. He was no mathematician, and the simple problem rather staggered him for a moment. Suddenly his face brightened.

"Begorra, Oi have it!" he cried.

"Well, what am it?"

"Sure, Oi will give Pretzel me own foive hundred besides, and thin he can divvy up aven perchune himsel' and me."

"Donnerwetter!" cried Pretzel. "Vhat ein paar plame shackasses you vas, anyhow! Vhat vor you divide d'ot moneys pefore you got him, ain't id? Vell, I guess so, maype!"

"Roight ye are, begob!" cried Paddy. "We had better get it before we go to countin' av it."

"Yas, an' ef we does get it I fink we done bettah let d'e boss divide it hisse'f."

"All roight; Oi won't kick about thot, Pompey," agreed Paddy.

Mr. Greenbough had returned within the house again and the crowd was beginning to disperse, and the trio of pards moved off toward the jail.

When Mr. Greenbough returned to the room to which his daughter had been carried, she was just coming to sufficiently to realize where she was and what had happened.

The doctor was bending over her, and Cutter was standing near, the women servants gathered on the other side of the bed.

"Thank Heaven! you live!"

So Mr. Greenbough exclaimed, on entering.

Laura smiled feebly in response. Her face was deathly pale.

"Can you permit her to talk, doctor?" the mine manager made inquiry.

"Yes, as soon as she feels able to do so, sir," the doctor assented. "The wound is not going to prove fatal, barring accident."

"My child, can you tell us who it was struck you the blow?" Mr. Greenbough eagerly questioned.

The young woman shook her head in the negative.

"Did you not see him?" the father asked.

"No, papa; I did not."

"Too bad! too bad!" Mr. Greenbough muttered. "But, he cannot hope to escape us, for we will find him out somehow. I still believe it was Sid Sullivan!"

"No, no, papa, it was not he," the young woman hurriedly declared.

"How do you know it wasn't, if you did not see him?" the father demanded.

"I—I am sure it was not he; he would not do such a thing. How can you think so ill of him? I am sure Mr. Sullivan

would not harm a hair of my head, papa."

"You have always championed him, I know, Laura," Mr. Greenbough observed, "but I cannot believe that you would shield him if you knew he had made this attempt upon your life. I discharged him not an hour ago, and he left the mine with terrible threats upon his lips."

"But, papa, he did not do this; I am sure he did not!"

"Then who did?"

"Alas! I do not know."

"Do you feel able to talk?"

"Yes."

"Did you not hear the assassin approaching the window?"

"No, papa."

"And the first you knew—"

"Was when something struck me in the back, and I felt a horrible, sickening sensation. My head grew light instantly, and that was the last I knew until a moment ago."

"That leaves us in the dark, then," said Mr. Greenbough, regretfully.

"Yes, sadly so," added Cutter. "But the evidence against Sullivan is almost positive."

"What is it, Edwin?" asked the wounded young lady.

"Why, he left the mine with terrible threats on his lips and hatred in his heart, and came this way. It was only a few minutes later when the alarm was given that you had been killed. We went at once to Sullivan's shanty and found the door locked. We found him washing, although he had not done a tap of work at the mine, and there was blood on the towel he was using. More than that, there was blood on the basin, and his knife, wet, lay on the table. If he did not strike you the blow, my darling, fate has turned all these appearances against him, that is all."

The girl was pale, and seemed to grow paler as she listened.

"And yet I will not believe him guilty," she asserted, emphatically. "I am sure he would never have done such a thing. He might have struck you, Edwin, or you, papa, in the heat of passion, but me—never—no, never!"

"Well, I hope you are right," rejoined Cutter. "It might have gone hard with him if the blow had been fatal."

The doctor now advised that the patient be allowed to rest, and all save one of the women servants withdrew from the room. Mr. Greenbough and his superintendent set out for the jail. The inability of the victim to say who had struck her the blow, admitting the possibility of Sullivan's innocence, had made the matter one of seemingly impenetrable mystery.

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER VOICE IN THE MATTER.

"Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten,
Dass ich so traurig bin;
Ein Märchen aus alten Zeiten—"

"By golly! ef yo' don' let up on d'at singin' in Dutch, an' gib us plain United States, d'ar' am gwine be a funeral heah, an' yo' done be in it!" interrupted Pomp, giving Pretzel a crack on the back.

"Bet ye'r swate loife on it!" chipped in Paddy. "Ef ye are bound and determined to sing, phwy dhe mischief don't ye sing it in talk dhat somebody kin understand, Pretzel? It isn't dhe chune dhat we are kickin' about, d'ye moind; we want to know phwat ye mane."

"Yaw, yaw, d'ot vas all right," answered Pretzel, with a show of indignation, "but how you vas goin' to learn him, maype, und you keeps on shokin' me off efery time when I goes to sing him? Py chimminy cheesewax! I gits me mine Dutch oop, pooty soon, ain't id? Und

knocks me der stuffin' mit you both oudt, maype! Maype you don't vas like d'ot singin', eh?"

"Thot's jest phwat's dhe matther," declared Paddy, "we don't like it in dhat lingo av yours."

"D'at am d'e p'int," cried Pomp. "Ef yo' kayn't sing it in U. S., don' yo' sing it er tall!"

"Id vas petter to singin' peen, maype, als to bray like a coople shackasses!"

Thus they wrangled while they made their way to the lock-up.

Pretzel, as we have said, was inclined to burst out into song in his native tongue, but Paddy and Pomp were determined that he should not sing unless he sang in English.

Whether or not Pretzel would ever attempt to render his song in English remains to be seen. If he did, he would probably make a sad mess of it, judging by the way he garbled every-day English when he tried to express himself at any length beyond a word or two.

There was quite a crowd around the jail.

The prisoner had been safely lodged within, and a guard was being appointed to see that he did not make his escape.

Jim Russel, the mayor of the camp, was now on hand, and was taking charge of the affair. He was a big fellow, something like Big Bill in size and general appearance.

"Now you know what ye have got ter do," he was saying to the men chosen to guard. "You aire to see to et that Sid Sullivan don't get out of this jug till he is wanted. If he does, somebody will have to answer for et, that's all. Ther life of Laura—"

"She ain't dead, boss," spoke up Paddy McCrum.

"Is that what all the yellin' was about? Bully fer that! But, all ther same, Sid has got ter stay hyar till he is cleared."

"What is that I hear?" called out the prisoner from within. "Do ye say that the lady is not dead?"

"That is what they say," answered Russel.

"Thank God for that!" fervently.

"Does that sound much like a guilty man?" demanded Big Bill. "I'll stake my life on his innocence!"

"Ef et don't mean that he is glad it wasn't fatal, now that he is in the jug for it," spoke up a citizen in the crowd. "Mebby that is what he is so thankful about."

But this was a man who was on bad terms with Sullivan, anyhow.

"Ther question is, who did it if Sid didn't?" demanded the mayor. "It looks dark fer him."

"I don't know," returned Big Bill, "but I am going to find out. And I reckon that you are as anxious as anybody to see the right party punished, Jim Russel?"

"Sartain; you kin tie to that, Bill Crawford."

Others had now come up, and the announcement of the big reward was made known. Not a man there but was eager to solve the mystery and earn the money.

Finally Mr. Greenbough and the superintendent approached, and Greenbough addressed Russel.

"Well, mayor, I suppose you have heard?"

"That ye'r darter isn't dead?"

"Yes."

"Yes, and we all thank God fer it," avowed the mayor, feelingly. "All the same, I will hold ther prisoner."

"We have come to see him," explained Cutter. "We want to have a talk with him, in the presence of everybody. Open the door and bring him out on the stoop, will you, please?"

"Sartain."

The mayor did accordingly, and Sullivan was brought out to face the crowd.

He was pale, but his eyes met every gaze fearlessly, and when he had looked all around his gaze rested finally upon Cutter and Greenbough.

"Ye thought I would be so cold-hearted as to kill ye'r gal, d'd ye, Greenbough?" he asked. "I am glad she isn't dead, but it is fer her own sake I say it, not yours."

"You had better have a care, sir," Greenbough cautioned. "You are not out of the woods yet. If we can find out who struck that blow, it will mean a mighty long term in prison for him, I can tell you. If you are the man—"

"But I am not the man!" asserted Sullivan. "It may look bad fer me, after the way I talked to ye at the mine, but I wouldn't 'a' harmed a hair of that gal's head fer a dozen Sullivan's Snaps! Ef you are that gal's daddy, and I s'pose ye are, she must take strongly after her mother, not after you!"

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. She is not a bit like you."

"That has nothing to do with this. We expect her to tell who struck her."

"And I hope she can do it, for that will clear me at once. And then, by Heavens! I'll find out who did it. But, ye will know then, of course!"

"What if I say to you that she has told us already, and that you are the man she has named?" queried Cutter.

"I would say that ye lied!" cried the prisoner, vehemently.

"That would be to say that Miss Greenbough lied."

"Which she would not do, fer you nor anybody else," retorted Sullivan. "I am not afraid of her sayin' a thing like that."

There was an earnestness and impressiveness about the man that carried conviction to more heads than one among the crowd present. Greenbough and Cutter exchanged a glance with each other.

"Will you let him go?" Cutter asked.

"Won't it be dangerous to do so?" queried Greenbough. "You know how he threatened us both."

"And I meant, too, by great, I did!" cried the prisoner. "Not that I would do a murder, but ef I could get in a lick at ye any other way, I meant ter do et! You know that mine belongs to me by honest rights!"

"Do you swear that you are innocent in this matter?" asked Greenbough.

"I have said so a dozen times."

"And if we let you go free, what will you do?"

"By Heavens! I'll try to find out who did ther business, first of all."

"Well, I have offered a reward of two thousand dollars to the man who can discover the scoundrel for me, and if you can earn that—"

"I don't want a cent of ye'r money!" averred Sullivan. "I would do et fer the lady, not fer a hog like you! She has done good turns fer me more'n once, and I don't forget sech things."

"That is one reason I say you are innocent, Sid," spoke up Big Bill.

"Of course I am!"

"Have you any proof, beyond your word, of what you told us about the blood on the towel, and your knife lying on the table?" inquired Cutter.

"Ef ye look sharp, ye may find drops of blood on the floor where it dropped while I was gettin' water in the basin when my nose bled, as I told ye," the prisoner declared.

"Well, on one condition I will let you go free," said Greenbough.

"Name et!"

"That you will take back the threats you made this morning, and will give us

no more trouble at the Sullivan's Snap. You have no claim there, as you know well enough—"

"No, by thunder! I won't do et!" cried the prisoner. "I have got a claim thar', as bein' the first discoverer of et, even ef ther law don't give me no holt on et, and I mean ter have my rights somehow! I'll stay hyar till I rot 'fore I'll give in to ye!"

"You will not rot there," spoke up a woman's voice, "for you will hang!"

CHAPTER VI.

GLOOMY FOR SULLIVAN.

"Silver Sallie!"

The name was spoken by a score of men at once.

A rather handsome-looking young woman, maybe twenty-five years of age, was making her way to the front.

She was plainly, but richly, dressed, diamonds sparkled in her ears, and she had a pair of keen black eyes that almost rivaled her diamonds in brightness. If anything, they were too bright.

Silver Sallie was a female sport, a woman who did not hesitate to win money at cards—in fact, that was her means of income, but who was of otherwise good enough character, so far as anybody knew. Since her sojourn at Poker Pocket no one had spoken a word against her.

"What do you mean, miss?" demanded Greenbough, immediately, when she had spoken the words quoted.

"I mean that this man is the murderer of your daughter, sir," was the reply, and she pointed with her jeweled finger straight at Sullivan.

The prisoner grew ghastly.

"What do you know against him, madam?" Greenbough further demanded.

"I heard it said at the hotel that he was posing as innocent, and I felt it my duty to tell what I know about the matter."

"Certainly."

"I was in my room at the hotel, from which your house can be seen, Mr. Greenbough, and also the mines. I happened to be looking out the window when I saw this man coming from that direction."

"Yes, yes; go on."

"Well, I saw him meet these three boys—they must tell you the same, if they tell the truth," indicating Paddy, Pomp and Pretzel. "They stopped and talked for a moment, and then went on, and the man went straight to your house, Mr. Greenbough, and passed out of sight there."

"And what more?"

"I did not think anything of it at the time, but presently, not a minute later, Sullivan came in sight again, hurrying as fast as he could, and he made straight for his shanty and jumped in and slammed the door after him. I wondered what he had been up to then, and it wasn't a minute later that the women rushed out of the house and went screaming in the direction of the mines."

She paused for breath, and appeared somewhat excited.

"What have you to say now?" from Cutter.

"I say et's an infernal lie!" the man fiercely asserted. "I never went to ther house at all!"

"How about it, boys?" turning to Paddy and his pards.

"Begorra, Oi have to tell dhe truth av it," Paddy spoke. "Sullivan wint in dhat direction whin he left us, no mistake."

"Yaw, d'ot vas recht," agreed Pretzel, "aber wir did not watch him to see where he peen vent to after d'ot."

"D'at am d'e fack ob d'e case," supported Pomp. "D'at's all we knows erbout et."

"Ther boys is all right," declared Sullivan; "I left 'em jest as Paddy has said, but I didn't go to that house. I was goin'

to go there, I admit; I was goin' to stone out every cussed winder in et; but I thought of Miss Laura and changed my mind. That's gospel fact. I went straight home, meanin' ter change my clothes and go and take on a jag of jig-water."

"Which is to say that I have come here with a lie on my lips," spoke up Silver Sallie, severely.

"Et don't mean nothin' else," was Sullivan's retort.

"Well, what I saw I saw," Silver Sallie averred. "It is strange that no one else saw you. Of course, it is only natural that you would deny it so I won't be so greatly offended."

"Yas, I do deny et!" Sullivan roared. "I call you a plumb blank liar, even ef ye are a woman! Ef ye was a man, and I had the use of my hands, I would take it out of y'er hide in about one minute, too! I didn't go no more'n half way across to the house, and not out of sight from ther hotel at all!"

"Unfortunately, I have only my bare word to offer," observed the woman, with coolness.

"That's all ye kin have," cried Sullivan. "What ye say is jest clear cussed falsehood!"

"This hyar business looks serious again," spoke up Jim Russel. "Lucky for you that the gal will live, Sullivan—"

"Not dead?" exclaimed the girl sport, excitedly.

"No, fortunately," assured Greenbough.

Silver Sallie seemed greatly disturbed at this bit of information, for a second, but perhaps it was only natural.

"Oh! I am so glad, Mr. Greenbough!" she quickly exclaimed. "It is almost as much a shock as it was to hear that she had been killed. Yes, be thankful, fellow," to Sullivan, "that she is not dead."

"Which I am," Sullivan protested. "I am goin' to know who done that dirty business, ef I git free."

"Yes, but you are not likely to get free, I think."

"That is what I was goin' to say," interposed the mayor. "I suppose you will swear to what ye have stated, Silver Sallie?"

"Why, certainly!"

"Then it is my duty to hold ye, Sid. You will have ter make ther best of et, ef ye aire innocent, as ye say. The appearances are all against ye, as ye will have to admit."

"A man can't fend himself against lies," was the growl.

"By the way, Silver Sallie," spoke Cutter.

"Well, sir, what is it?"

"I suppose there is no chance that you were mistaken in the man?"

"Do you think I am crazy or a fool? Of course I am not mistaken! The man I saw was Sid Sullivan, and he entered his own house."

"No, she ain't mistaken; she's a liar!" exploded the prisoner, in hot anger.

"You see how my evidence acts upon him," remarked the woman, with a jerk of her jeweled hand in Sid's direction.

With that she turned and went back again in the direction of the hotel, leaving the group about the jail door in something of a quandary. Only for her, no doubt, the man would have been freed.

"What is going to be done?" inquired Cutter.

"Thar' ain't but one thing, as I can see," responded the mayor.

"And what is that?" inquired Greenbough.

"Well, you mean ter push ther case, don't ye?"

"Yes, by Heavens, to the bitter end!"

"Then we must hold fast to Sullivan. Everything points to his guilt, and he will

have to prove himself innocent before we kin let him go."

"I don't blame ye, Jim, not a bit," spoke Sullivan, bitterly. "Fate has made up her mind to down me, I reckon. Ef ther gal was dead, I reckon nothin' would save me from Judge Lynch."

"It would be a bad chance fer ye, that I allow."

"And yet I swear again that I am innocent, spite of everything," the man earnestly maintained.

"And I mean ter undertake to prove that ye are, too, in spite of everything," announced Big Bill. "I can't believe et of ye, Sid."

"And you know me, Big Bill," the prisoner reminded. "I don't deny that I hate Greenbough and his dude of a super, hate 'em like p'izen, but when et comes to ther leetle gal— Wull, jest ask her ef she thinks et was Sid done et!"

"That point has been settled in your favor already, sir," assured Cutter, unreservedly. "I am only sorry that she did not see the person who struck her the cowardly blow."

"So am I!" echoed the prisoner. "It is white of ye to say so, anyhow, Mr. Cutter."

"I have no malice against you, my man," the superintendent declared. "I want to see you proven innocent, if innocent you are, but, as you admit yourself, all the appearances are against you at present."

"We have no choice in the matter," assumed Mr. Greenbough. "You will have to hold him, Russel, while the case is being investigated, and if he can't be cleared he will have to stand trial. The matter is too serious to be passed over lightly, for the life of my child is at stake. Great Heavens! I shudder when I think of her narrow escape!"

And with an actual shudder he turned away, Cutter going with him, and the prisoner was returned into the jail and a strong guard placed over him.

It did look dark for Sid Sullivan.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THREE PARDS PUZZLED.

Paddy, Pomp and Pretzel followed the crowd in the direction of the hotel.

They had taken in everything that had been said, and their interest in the puzzle was increasing with every passing minute.

In the first place, the injured young lady had ever been kind to them, and they held her in high esteem and were eager to find and punish the man who had made so dastardly an attempt upon her life.

Then, too, they did not believe that Sid Sullivan was the one who had done it—that is to say, they had not believed it up to the time of Silver Sallie's testimony, but now they were greatly troubled over the situation. For some distance they said nothing.

Suddenly Pretzel started to sing:

"Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten,
Dass ich so traurig bin;
Ein—"

He had got that far before Paddy or Pomp realized what was going on, but as soon as they did they brought him to a stop in short order.

"By dhe powers!" protested Paddy. "Oi bela've ye would sing av it was yure own grandmother's funeral dhat was on hand, ye sourcrouter! Phwat do ye mane by it, anyhow?"

He gave Pretzel a lifter with his foot on a fleshy portion of his corporeality.

"D'at am d'e way to fix him!" approved Pomp. "When yo' kin sing d'at d'ar' song in plain United States, yo' kin go ahead, an' not befo'!"

"Phwat dhe dickens does it mane, any—"

Paddy's Trump Card.

how?" demanded Paddy. "Ik vise nikt, vass soul ess bedoyten— Be Hivvins, Oi'll bet dhere ain't a haythin on earth can tell phwat thim words mane. Phwat is it, Pretzel?"

"Vell, I don't know—"

So Pretzel started to translate, but Paddy, not knowing that, interrupted him sharply.

"Thin, be Hivvins, all dhe more rayson phwy ye should not be singin' av it, av ye don't know phwat it manes!" he cried. "Any Dutchman dhat don't know phwat his own lingo—"

"Ach! vhat a gosh-vor-plame shackass you vas, anyhow, Paddy!" the Dutch boy exclaimed in disgust. "You wouldn't know vhen id vas raining, maype, und sompody didn't told you. You make me d'ot tired feeling have all over mit mine-self all in some places, ain't it!"

Just then they were overtaken by Big Bill.

"What do you boys think about this hyar puzzle?" Bill asked.

"By golly!" asseverated the dorky, "we don't know what to fink ob it, shuah! It done knock spots out ob eberyfing, et do."

"You are about right, it does," agreed Bill.

"Phwat do ye t'ink about it ye'rsel'?" asked Paddy.

"I'm about like Pomp," Big Bill answered. "I don't know what ter think about et. I don't believe Sid Sullivan done et."

"Dhen phwat about phwat Silver Sallie said?"

"That is what stumps me. I shouldn't think she'd lie about et, and yet I can't see why Sid should lie, either."

"Id vas pooty fundy," observed Pretzel, in undertone.

"Should say it was funny," agreed Bill. "I can't see into et, unless Sid knows who did it, and won't tell."

"Begorra, he would be a fool not to tell!" cried Paddy.

"So I would say, too, but Sid Sullivan is a queer cuss, and if it happened to be a friend of his, he would die before he would blat on him!"

"D'at am all right," reminded Pomp, "but he done say he didn't go to d'e house er tall, an' what yo' gwine make out ob d'at? 'Pears to me like d'ey was bofe crazy, by golly!"

"Well, somebody did ther business fer the gal, or kem mighty close to et," said Big Bill, "and I mean to know who it was if I have to lay off a month to find out. I don't lay claim to bein' a detective, but I am goin' to try my hand at it this time, you bet."

"Yaw, und so vas us," chipped in Pretzel. "Ve been going vor d'ot zwei t'ousand tollars like der doose!"

"All right, and I hope ye win et. All I want is to clear Sid."

They had now reached the hotel of the camp, and Big Bill left them and entered the bar-room, where a goodly crowd of men was assembled.

The three pards passed on, and went in the direction of the mine manager's house, where only a few persons were now lingering around, talking over the case as they went.

Suddenly Pretzel exclaimed:

"Say! vhat vas d'as you picked oop von der vinder unter, Paddy?"

"Dat's so, what was it?" echoed Pomp. "Nebber done fink ob d'at again, by golly! what was it?"

Paddy took the object out of his pocket.

"Here it is," holding it up to view.

"Phwat do yez t'ink av it?"

"Hit am only a button," sneered Pomp.

"Und not mooch vor a button at d'ot," from Pretzel.

"But it's a button all dhe same,"

averred Paddy, "and dhe question is, who lost it dhere?"

"By golly, d'at am so!" ejaculated Pomp. "Mebbe de one what done lost it d'ar' am d'e one what done stick d'e knife into po' Missy Greenbough."

"Donnerwetter! vhat for shackasses ve been, anyway, ain't it?" Pretzel chipped in. "All ve got to do peen to find der man vhat e'n button hafe lost, und ve been all hoonk!"

"It don't belong to you, does, it?" asked Paddy.

"Nein, nein; I hafe got all mine buttons, ich danke ihnen!"

"Ye don't act as if ye have, sometimes, anyhow, begob," declared Paddy.

"Paddy, yo' am d'e head ob d'is heah combination," said Pomp. "What yo' gwine do wiv' d'at button?"

"We have got to find dhe owner, Pomp."

"D'at am so, I reckon."

"And dhe question is, who wears buttons of this kind?"

"Id vas nicht Sid Sullivan, you can pet your poots on d'ot," said Pretzel, decisively.

"Roight ye are, Pretzel," agreed Paddy. "Phwat is more, Oi have never seen buttons loike dhis wan in Poker Pocket at all at all. Oi want yez both to take a good look at it."

"I has done looked," said Pomp.

"Und I would know him in der dark," declared Pretzel.

"Well, Oi want yez both to kape yure eyes peeled fur buttons loike it, do ye moind?"

"Yo' bet yo' life!"

"D'ot vas righdt, efery times!"

"And if you see anybody dhat has buttons loike it, and wan av thim missin', begorra, he's our mutton!"

"Vill you show id to any beebles?" asked Pretzel.

"Nary a people!" demurred the Irish boy. "Yez must kape as tight as a bung about it, fur av it gets out dhat a button has been found, it is never a sight av dhe mates to it we'd be getting."

"Yaw, yaw, d'ot vas so," agreed Pretzel.

Paddy returned the button to his pocket and they continued on their way.

When they came to Mr. Greenbough's house they passed around to the side where they had before observed the open window. This window was now closed.

It was useless to think of discovering anything further there, now, after so many people had trampled all over the place, but they wanted to study the situation a little.

This window was on the side of the house nearest the mines. Near it a high board fence ended and a low paling fence joined, the first extending toward the rear, and the latter inclosing the yard in front. There was no gate at that point, but there was one in the board fence in the rear part of the back yard.

In the front yard were two gates, and the yard there was filled with flowers and plants. If Sid Sullivan was the guilty one, it looked as if he must have run around the board fence to the rear, entered by the rear gate, and, having done the crime, made his escape by the gates in front. But came the question, Why had he not been seen?

The window of Silver Sallie's room in the hotel certainly commanded a view of the front of the house and the whole distance between the house and Sid Sullivan's shanty. If she had told the truth, it certainly looked dark for Sullivan. And what reason could she have for telling a lie? Was he the guilty man? He had left the mine in a frame of mind equal to almost any desperate act, and all the indications thus far pointed at him.

The three pards were in a quandary.

CHAPTER VIII.

BIG BILL TAKES A HAND.

Paddy, Pomp and Pretzel had been gone from the house only a little while when Big Bill came there.

He was, as described, a big fellow, and he was as coarse as he was large, but he had an honest heart, almost as big as the heart of an ox—as it was said of him.

He was roughly clad in working garb.

He knocked at the door.

A servant opened it, and he inquired for Mr. Greenbough.

The mine manager and his superintendent had returned to the house, and as Big Bill was well known he was readily admitted.

Cleaning his big boots well on the mat, Bill slouched in with his hat in his hand and followed the servant into the manager's library, where Greenbough was smoking.

Cutter had returned to the mine.

Mr. Greenbough looked happy, for the doctor had just informed him that he had no doubt of Laura's recovery.

"How are you, Bill Crawford?" he greeted. "Come right in and sit down and try one of these cigars. Isn't it glorious that my daughter is going to get well?"

"That's what it is, fer a fact, and I'm durnashun glad of et," Bill avowed, as he deposited himself carefully on the edge of a chair. "Et would have been too horrible ter contemplate, Mr. Greenbough, if she had been killed, as was intended all right enough!"

"My God! don't mention it!"

"I have come fer a talk, Mr. Greenbough."

"All right, Bill; what is it?"

"I am as sure of Sid Sullivan's innocence as I am that I didn't do ther deed, boss."

"Well, I hope you are right, Bill, and I hope you can prove him so. I am only anxious to get hold of the right party, you know. I have nothing against Sid, I declare."

"Et was too bad that things happened as they did, for everything looks black against him, most 'specially what Silver Sallie said."

"Yes, that was certainly bad."

"And et was mighty strange, fer I don't see why she would want to lie about et."

"No; for she was certainly a disinterested party. If it had not been for her testimony we might have believed Sullivan innocent, but with it— Well, I do not know how he can be cleared."

"And yet I say that I believe him. One or the other of 'em must lie, and I believe Sid first."

"Then you think the woman—"

"I will put et milder, boss; I will say she must be mistaken."

"And yet she is positive that she was not. I confess that I am utterly puzzled, Big Bill."

"And so be I, b'gosh! Thar' is some things that I want ter ask ye about, ef ye don't mind?"

"Ask anything you will, for I know your purpose is right."

"You can bet et is! Well, was this Silver Sallie on good terms with your daughter?"

"Why, yes; they were quite friendly, I believe. Not that they were what you would call intimate, but both were fond of music, and as both could speak a little of French, they were drawn together."

"She came here occasionally, didn't she?"

"Well, yes, after I satisfied myself that she was of good enough character as far as I could find out. She is a sport, makes her living by cards, but I never have heard a word against her other so good name, and as my daughter was lonesome I could not forbid her the house."

"How did that acquaintance spring up? Your darter has never been into any of the places in ther camp."

"Laura heard her singing a French ditty one day, and sent for her."

"I see."

"But, surely, you would not suspect her of the crime?"

"Wull, no; but she is no better'n Sid Sullivan, when et comes down to et, and I want to git at ther facts."

"Well, I have given them to you, as far as possible."

"Now, how does this sport gal stand to'rds Ed Cutter?"

"Why, she knows him, and that is all, I guess. I never heard of his having anything to do with her."

"No, nor me, and that is what I want to find out. You see, ef et could be shown up that she is in love with Cutter, then thar' would be a motive fer ther crime, but—"

"That is too frightful to be entertained for a moment, Bill."

"I can't help et, boss; I am after ther truth, and I am bound to have et. Or, mebbly it was the other way."

"What other way?"

"Some other feller loved your darter, and, ruther than see her married to Cutter, would take her life. Not sayin' that et is so, but these hyar things have come to my mind."

"You are wrong, you are wrong, Bill."

"Wull, I hope I am."

"If you are convinced of Sullivan's innocence, why do you not let your first work be to clear the suspicions away from him?"

"Ain't that what I'm tryin' to do? If suspicion kin be put anywhere else with reason, that will divide et, at least, and Sid will have some show. I tell ye I will never believe him guilty."

"You must have a good reason for it."

"I have, too. I know him well; he has done favors for me in time past, and I know he couldn't do sech a thing."

"My daughter herself is of the same opinion."

"Then who did do et? That is what I am drivin' at, boss. Ef Silver Sallie seen what she said, then Sid Sullivan knows who done et."

"Why does he not tell, then?"

"Ef et's a friend of his he would hang before he would squeal."

"More fool he."

"That is Sid's way."

"It is a poor way, and I have no faith in it. I believe if he knew he would tell quick enough."

"We won't argy that, boss. Et ain't no use. What I want to know more is, do you know of anything that kin throw any suspicion anywhere else? I am bound ter git at ther truth."

"I do not, Bill."

"Then that is all I kin get here, et 'pears. You know as well as I do that et may be tried again, ef we don't git ther cuss."

"The reason why I have offered a good reward, my man. Go in, and if I can be of the least service, do not hesitate to call on me. If Sullivan is innocent, I desire to see him freed."

Big Bill rose to take his leave.

"That is fair talk, boss, and I can't ask no more," he said. "I don't suppose that you have got any enemy ye'rself that would do sech a thing as this out of 'venge, have ye?"

"No one but Sid Sullivan—"

"I mean besides him?"

"No, not to my knowledge."

"Then I ain't no more to say. I hoped that mebbly you could throw some light onto ther puzzle, and I believe ye would ef ye could."

Just at that moment came another knock at the door.

Mr. Greenbough, too, rose to his feet, as if expecting he knew not what, and neither spoke.

A servant was heard going to the door, which was promptly opened, and in the same moment a voice with a decided Irish brogue to it was heard inquiring:

"Is Big Bill here? Av he is, tell him dhat he is wanted at dher mayor's office instanter. Ye say he is here? Dhen tell him to make all dhe haste he can, fur things is goin' rough wi'd Sid Sullivan, and no mistake—"

"What is it, my boy?" asked Mr. Greenbough, who had opened the l'brary door and now stepped into the hall. "What has happened now?"

"Come along wi'd Bill and see, sor," responded Paddy, for he it was.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHAIN DRAWS TIGHT.

Paddy McCrum was off like the wind.

Big Bill was close after him, and Mr. Greenbough was not long in following.

The mayor's office was in a building opposite the hotel, and a great crowd was seen before the door, with evident excitement.

Pomp and Pretzel were waiting for Paddy just on the outer edge of the crowd, and as soon as he joined them the three pards made a dash around to the rear of the building.

Paddy motioned Big Bill to follow, and Mr. Greenbough was close enough to take the cue himself.

The crowd without was calling for the lynching of Sullivan.

Something was up, certainly.

Big Bill, the three boys, and Mr. Greenbough all entered the office by the rear way together.

The others had waited for Mr. Greenbough to come up, at the request of the man who was on guard at the rear door, so that he would not have to open it again, he explained.

On entering the office, they found there quite a group of men, with faces stern and troubled.

Mayor Russel was slightly pale, but he was grim.

"What is et?" demanded Big Bill.

"More evidence against Sid Sullivan," explained the mayor. "You hear what the crowd outside is howling?"

Big Bill paled, and his hands fell upon his guns.

"They have got ter walk over me afore they kin hang him," he assured. "I have gone inter this hyar thing, and I am goin' to see it through, you bet! What is ther proof?"

"Plug Seely hyar says that he seen Sid do ther business."

Big Bill turned instantly upon a hang-dog looking fellow who was standing in front of the mayor's desk.

He was an unsavory customer, in appearance, with a reputation that was not to be envied, and a sickly expression came over him as his eyes met those of the giant Bill.

"You seen him do et?" Big Bill thundered.

"Y—yas, I did."

"You swar' to that?"

"Yas, I will swar' to et, ef need be."

"Wull, need be is ther word, you bet! I believe you lie like sin, that is my opine of you!"

"That is something you must prove, Bill," insisted the mayor. "The most important thing now is to attend to this mob outside before they make a rush for ther jail."

Big Bill paled.

"They must not do that, he gasped.

"Speak to 'em, Jim, and cool 'em off, ef ye kin."

"I have already done so, but they refuse to be cooled, you see for yourself. They are all of the worst gang in ther camp, but there's a good many good men with 'em, too."

"Then you must speak to 'em, Mr. Greenbough," and Big Bill turned to him. "Thar' ain't been no murder, anyhow, as it turns out, even ef Sid was guilty, which I still stick to he ain't. And, say, send to ther mine and have Cutter come down with ther men."

"Yes, that I will do, instantly," said Mr. Greenbough. "Here, you Pomp, ran to the mine and tell Mr. Cutter to come here instantly with every man he has got at work!"

"Yes, sah!"

Pomp made a dash for the rear exit, and was off immediately.

"We want Sid Sullivan!" roared the crowd without. "No need ter wait fer any more proof now!"

"And we aire goin' to have him, too, you bet!" another portion of the mob joined in the next moment. "Thar' will never be another such piece of business at Poker Pocket ef we kin help et!"

"You hear?" said the mayor. "They won't heed me."

"They shall heed me, then," cried Big Bill, making a stride to the door and drawing the bolt and throwing it open.

At sight of him, a shout went up from the crowd without. It was known that he had taken the stand he had in favor of Sullivan, and just then the crowd had no love for him in consequence.

"Whar' are ye now, Big Bill?" cried one.

"Sid Sullivan innocent, is he, in ther face of all?"

"Two witnesses, and all ther evidence piled up against him like it is?"

"I am right hyar!" cried Bill, bringing his guns halfway to the level. "Yes, Sid Sullivan is innocent, spite of et all!"

The mob laughed.

"Then Plug Seely is a liar, is he? Silver Sallie is a liar, is she? Ther blood on ther towel and in ther basin counts fer nothin', does et? And what of ther bowle, that had jest been washed?"

Immediately there was another angry roar for vengeance.

The camp of Poker Pocket had never seen anything like it in all its history.

"I allow et looks bad," said Bill, in firm tone, "but I still have faith in Sid Sullivan fer all that, and I am goin' to stick to him to ther last."

"Yer won't have long to stick to him, then; hey, pards?"

"That's what's ther matter!"

Big Bill's guns came up a little higher.

"I want a word with you fellers," he cried. "In ther first place, thar' ain't been no murder yet, and thar' is no call for a hangin'. In ther next place, I take ye all to be white men and willin' to give a poor devil a chance for his life by a fair trial, anyhow."

"It wasn't his fault that he didn't kill ther angel!" some one yelled.

"That's so! that's so!"

"Yank him!"

"Hold on!" ordered Bill. "Mr. Greenbough himself is here, and he has a word ter say to ye. Ef ye are men ye will listen to reason."

Mr. Greenbough stepped out at that, and a silence fell over the crowd at once, for the mine manager was at least respected. If the crowd could be held in for a few minutes more, there would be help from the mines.

"My friends," Greenbough said, "you must do nothing rash in this matter. I know the respect in which you hold my daughter, and the good feeling that

prompts your action, but you must not be hasty. Sid Sullivan must have the fairest kind of a trial this camp can give him."

"What's ther use?" asked one man.

"Because the law says so, if for no other reason," was the reply. "What is more, boys, my daughter herself declares her belief that Sullivan did not do the deed, and she would never forgive you if you took this rash step."

There was no rejoinder.

"And still further, Sullivan has never harmed one of you, and how would you feel if it turned out that you had lynched an innocent man? Besides, this camp must have no such blot upon its name, and what is further and final, I forbid any such action on your part."

A low murmur was heard, and the crowd seemed ready to disperse.

By this time Cutter and the men from the mines were near at hand, and Pomp had given them an understanding of the situation.

"What is it, Mr. Greenbough?" hailed Cutter.

"Take the men and form a cordon around the jail and protect that prisoner," was the response.

The superintendent led the way to the jail immediately, and the trouble for the present seemed to have been averted, although it had been a narrow escape for Sullivan.

The crowd evinced an inclination to break up.

Mr. Greenbough and Big Bill turned back again into the office, where there still found the man Plug Seely, as he was called.

Big Bill demanded to know all about what he knew, and questioned the fellow at great length. Seely stuck to the story he had first told, that he had seen Sid Sullivan stab the girl and leap the fence and run to his shanty.

The reason he had not mentioned it before, and the reason that he did not give the alarm at once, he said, was because he was afraid that suspicion might fasten upon him. Now that he had the testimony of Silver Sallie to support his statement, he could make it known without fear.

Closely questioned, yet his statement did not vary from the point, and it had to be accepted. The chain was thus tightened around Sullivan.

CHAPTER X.

MORE EVIDENCE GIVEN.

The excitement over, and Plug Seely having been dismissed, Big Bill set out for the jail.

He had a pass from the mayor that would admit him to see the prisoner, and on arriving there he had no trouble about getting in.

There was now an immense guard around the jail, all well armed, and it was almost as impossible for the crowd to get at Sullivan as it was for Sullivan to get out and make his escape.

"Is that you, Bill?" the prisoner asked.

"Yes, I have come to see you. I want to ask a question or two."

"Well, ask as many as you want to, Bill, but afore ye begin let me ask one of you."

"Ask it."

"What have you found out?"

"Nothing, so far. It is a deep mystery, pard."

"And how does it stand against me by this time? Is it clearing up any?"

"Not a bit. If anything, it is worse than ever. And that brings me to it. What do you think of Plug Seely?"

"Ther p'izenest galoot in ther 'hull Pock-

et!" the prisoner cried. "Why, what has he been up ter? Et wouldn't surprise me a whole lot to hear that he had been gobbled for the murder himself."

"Worse than that, Sid."

"What d'ye mean?"

"He swears that he seen you do it."

"What? Ther infernal galoot says that? Wait till I git out and git a show at him!"

"Ef ye ever do, pard."

"So that's what it was all about, eh? That is what brought all these men here, eh? I begin to see through it now. Plug Seely has been my foe for some time past, and he means to do me this time."

"He has a grudge against you?"

"Yes, et's too long a story to tell now, but he has been layin' fer me fer a long while."

"Then that may account for it. Do you think that he is the one who stabbed the young lady?"

"I would hate to think him that mean, but I know he wouldn't 'a' hesitated to stab me if he got a show."

"Then it may be a lie he has worked up."

"Yes, or the one that done it may have hired him to tell ther lie."

"Well, I will find out. Keep 'up your heart, pard, and I will do all that can be done fer ye."

"Does anybody else believe me innocent?"

"Yes; the lady herself, and ther three boy pards, Paddy, Pomp and Pretzel. They have offered to help me all they kin to prove up fer ye."

"Bless 'em, they are trumps, every one of 'em! You kin trust 'em, Bill, to ther full limit, and you won't find 'em wantin' when et comes to ther pinch, you can bet your life on that!"

"Oh, I know that fast enough."

And with that Big Bill took his leave and joined the trio of trumps.

"Phwat does he say?" asked Paddy.

Bill repeated the substance of what had been said, and the pards agreed with him that Plug Seely had given false evidence.

"Id vas a pooty plame hardt nud to grack," declared Pretzel. "Der more ve finds oudt, der more id looks like Sid Sullivan hafe done id, maybe, I reckon. Id vas a buzzer!"

"Yo' am jes 'bout right, it's a puzzler," agreed Pomp. "But, by golly, we are gwine to git d'ar' if d'e traces hold, yo' bet yo' life!"

"Thot's phwat's the matther," approved Paddy.

On their way back to the hotel Paddy took Big Bill into his confidence regarding the button, Bill having promised to keep the secret.

This discovery delighted the giant, as Bill was sometimes called, owing to his size, and he took hold of the case with renewed courage immediately. He had now a ray of hope.

At the hotel they parted, Bill going into the bar-room, and the boys strolling off to the rear, discussing the matter.

There lived at Poker Pocket a rather queer character who was known as Mother Goose. She was a Swedish woman, well on in years, and she lived all alone in a shanty close back against the hills that formed one side of the Pocket.

She kept chickens, geese and ducks, and supplied eggs to the hotel, with an occasional fowl, when she found she had one on hand that was getting too old to be of any use. She was not on friendly terms with the three pards, they having been the cause of much annoyance to her in time past.

Discussing the mystery, the boys were close to Mother Goose's ranch before they were aware of it. The first they realized

of it was when the old woman called out to them in her cracked voice.

The lads stopped short instantly.

"Py chimminy cheesevax!" cried Pretzel. "Ve petter had dust oudt of here, ain'dt id?"

"Golly! yo' am right!" exclaimed Pomp. "She done break our necks if we don't, for tyin' her geese all together in a string, like we done d'e other week, shua as yo' lib!"

"But she don't seem ter be mad," Paddy called attention. "She seems to want to spake wi'd us. But mebbys dhat is only a thrick to get us wi'din reach of dhat long shtick she carries. Come on, dthough, and we'll see phwat is dhe matther wi'd dhe old dame."

They went forward cautiously.

The old woman was standing outside the fence that surrounded her shanty, leaning upon her staff.

She had a hump on her back, her nose was crooked, and she lacked only a broom and a stretch of the imagination for the beholder to see her setting sail for the moon.

"Phwat do ye be afther wanting, Mother Goose?" asked Paddy, when they came to a halt at a safe distance.

"Ya' naadn't baan afraad," the old woman responded, in her flattish manner of speech. "Aa waant ta sattle with ya' saam taime, but naat naow. When Aa do, Aa'll make ya' yump, ya' baat!"

"Dhat's all right, Mother Goose," cried Paddy. "Ye don't owe us anything, so dhere is nothin' to settle. Phwat is it ye want, dhen?"

"Aa want ya' to faind Baig Baill and saand him haar."

"Big Bill?"

"Yap."

"All right, Mother Goose, but Oi won't promise ye dhat he will come unless he knows phwat ye want him fur."

"Ya can tell him Aa know saamthin' about who killed tha leddy, or tried ta kill her, Aa maan."

"Begorra! dhat will fetch him, fast enough, you kin bet," Paddy cried.

"Be aaf with ya', thaan."

"You bet!"

Paddy led the way, running, and they lost no time in presenting themselves before Big Bill in the bar-room of the hotel.

"What is it?" Bill demanded.

"Mother Goose wants to see ye, post haste and double quick," explained Paddy. "She knows something about the crime, she says."

It was said in a low tone, so that no one else might hear.

"Ther doose!"

So exclaimed Bill, and he set out with the pards immediately.

"You must let us in too," said Paddy, as they hastened along. "If we are workin' together we must kape posted."

"D'at's what's d'e matter wiv' Hanner!" exclaimed Pomp. "We's gwine git d'ar' somehow, if d'ey done hab' to drag us in be d'e years 'fo' we gits done. D'ah's no flies on us, hey, Pretzel?"

"Vell, I guess nodd," the Dutch boy agreed.

When they reached Mother Goose's domain the old woman had objection to allowing the three boys to enter, so they had to remain outside while Big Bill went in.

What she had to tell may be summed up briefly, for it was far too long in the telling. It was to the effect that at about the time when Miss Greenbough was stabbed, a little before or after, perhaps, she could not say as to that, she had seen a young man, a stranger to her, rather sportishly dressed, hurrying into the hotel yard by the rear way. She did not know him, had never seen him before, and had not seen him since.

Who had that young man been?

CHAPTER XI.

PADDY'S BLARNEY.

Big Bill and the three pards returned immediately to the hotel.

There Big Bill made the most diligent inquiry for such a person as Mother Goose had described.

But it was all to no purpose, for there was not a person in or about the house, so far as he was able to learn, who had seen anything of a stranger answering to the description.

So, finally, Bill gave it up, and he and the lads went out.

"It stumps me," Bill remarked. "But, hello! hyar is somethin' that stumps me 'most as bad!"

He jerked his thumb in the direction of up the street.

There were Edwin Cutter and Silver Sallie going in the direction of the Greenbough cottage together.

It seemed evident that they had come out of the hotel only a moment or two before, just before Big Bill and the boys had come out from the bar-room. So Bill made a guess, at any rate, and he was right.

Cutter had called on the girl sport for a double purpose. In the first place, he wanted to get a look from the windows of her room, to see just what view was commanded in the direction of the mines, and then he wanted to question her more closely regarding what she had seen.

He had found the young woman on the point of setting out to call at the Greenbough cottage, and, after a talk with her, set forth with her for that destination.

"Phwat does et mane?" questioned Paddy.

"Ich weiss nicht," said Pretzel, with a shrug.

"Now, d'ar' yo' goes ergain wiv' some mo' ob ye'r Dutch!" cried Pomp.

"Begorra, dhat is dhe same t'ing ye are always startin' in to sing, too!" exclaimed Paddy. "Phwat does it mane, ye sour-crouter?"

"I don't know—"

"Dhe mischief ye don't know! Phwat did ye say it fur, dhen?"

"Ach! vhat ein shackass!" cried Pretzel. "Id vas vhat der vords means, I don't know, I don't know."

"Oh! is dhat it? 'Id vas nikt,' manes Oi don't know. Is dhat it? Whoop, hooray! Pomp, we are gettin' onto his song in great shape now, sure as you are a brunette!"

"Yaw, yaw, d'ot vas righdt," Pretzel approved.

"D'en, by golly! don' yo' nebber sing d'at part ob d'e song in Dutch no mo'!" warned Pomp. "Yo kin begin it in United States, if yo' can't do no mo', shua, and mebbly yo' will be able to let us know what d'e whole business means some time. Hope so, anyhow."

Pretzel gave another shrug, but did not rejoin.

Meanwhile Bill was watching the mine superintendent and Silver Sallie, and they were seen to go to the Greenbough cottage and enter.

"I don't know anything about your Dutch or about your song," said Bill, "but I would like to know what has brought them two together. Say, Paddy, ain't you blarney enough and detective enough to go to the house and find out?"

"Begob, Oi kin thry it!"

"Go ahead, then, and good luck attend ye," encouraged Bill.

"D'at am all right," muttered Pomp, "but what about we uns? We wants to be in it, too, hey, Pretzel?"

"You pet your poots ve does!" the Deutscher promptly exclaimed.

"But we can't all go, dhat is dead

sure," reminded Paddy. "You and Pomp can amuse ye'rsel's rasslin' with Dutch till Oi git back again, whin Oi will put ye onto all Oi learn."

Paddy waved his hand at them and was off.

Big Bill went in the other direction, in quest of Mayor Russel, with whom he desired to have a further talk, and Pomp and Pretzel strolled away together in yet another course, Pretzel humming:

"I don't know, wass soll es bedeuten—"

But that was as far as he got before Pomp interrupted him, and there was forthwith a lesson in translation such as would have caused the bones of poor Heine to turn over in their grave, perhaps, could the author of "Die Lorelei" have known anything about it.

Let us follow Paddy McCrum.

He was well known at the cottage, so he went around by the rear way and entered the kitchen.

There was a colored cook whom he knew well and a good-looking Irish girl whom he desired to find favor with, albeit he was already on pretty good terms with her. These two were present.

"How is dhe lady?" Paddy respectfully asked.

"She done be easy now, Paddy," answered the cook. "Lucky she wasn't hurt no wuss!"

"Roight ye are!" cried Paddy. "Oi thought Oi would drop in and ask after her, and hoped dhat maybe Oi would get a chance to see her, too, but Oi suppose dhat is impossible."

"No, I don't think it is," spoke up the Irish girl, who had only a delightful suggestion of brogue in her speech. "But you will have to wait now till other callers go away, Paddy."

"Dhat is all right, Kitty," assented Paddy. "Sure, maybe it is ye'rsel' dhat can entertain me dhe manewhile, Oi dunno?"

"Go long with you," the girl exclaimed, blushing.

"Ob cou'se yo' can," chipped in the colored cook. "Yo' jes' take him up to d'e missy's sittin'-room till d'em d'ar' oder folks goes away, an' I know d'e missy be glad to see him."

"Dhen she isn't hurt so bad, after all?"

"No; d'e doctah be done say hit am only a nasty flesh cut, d'at am all, an' she done git well all right."

"Bully!" ejaculated the Irish boy. "O'm awful glad of dhat. Come, Kitty, dhat is a good idee, and Oi want to be talkin' wi'd ye, anyhow. Sure, such a trate don't happen every day!"

"D'at am so, d'at am so," approved the cook. "Yo' go right erlong wiv' him."

"Well, come this way, then," and the blushing Kitty conducted him from the room to a neat little sitting-room on the next floor, where they entered, and where Kitty invited her caller to take a seat.

"Dhis is imminse!" exclaimed Paddy, in undertone, as he settled down in a nice easy chair. "Sure, Kitty, Oi don't care av dhe other folks stay an hour, an' ye can spare dhat much toime!"

"Which I can't," the girl declared. "If they don't go in ten minutes, you will have to entertain ye'rsel'."

"Dhen Oi hope it will be dhe longest tin minutes dhat Oi ever seen in me loife," said Paddy. "But, by dhe same token, Oi suppose it will be dhe shortest, fur dhey say good t'ings don't last long."

"Go along with your blarney," cried Kitty.

"But, say, Kitty, Oi want to talk wi'd ye about dhe murtherin' gossoon dhat thried to kill Miss Laura."

"What do you want to talk about that for?"

"Begorra, it is mesel', wi'd Pomp and

Pretzel, dhat is going to foind him out, av we can do it!"

"Well, it is no use asking me anything, Paddy, for I don't know a thing about it any more than you do. It is just awful, and I was almost frightened into fits!"

"Oi want to ask ye, did ye see a young man around here dh's morning," and he described such a person as Mother Goose claimed to have seen.

"No, I did not, Paddy," the girl assured.

"Well, Oi want to be askin' Miss Laura if she saw anybody av dhat koind," Paddy said further, "fur Oi bel'ave such a man was around."

"All right, as soon as Mr. Cutter and the woman go away, Paddy."

"Phwat d'ye t'ink av dhat woman, Kitty?"

"I think she is crazy, Paddy."

"Crazy?"

"Yes, I do."

"Phwy do ye t'ink dhat?"

"Oh, I don't know; she has funny ways, I think."

"Well, say, did ye ever see a button dhe loikes av dh's wan?" and Paddy showed the one he had found.

"No, I never did, Paddy."

"Well, don't ye say any'ing about it, Kitty. Oi will ask Miss Laura, and maybe she can tell me somet'ing about it. Phwat! ye are not going so soon?"

"Soon!" exclaimed Kitty. "Can't you see by the clock that I have been here a full quarter of an hour? Do you suppose I have nothing else to do but to ch'in to you. I will tell you when they go away."

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT PADDY McCRUM HEARD.

Kitty thus took herself away before there was any chance for a tete-a-tete, and Paddy was left alone.

The lad felt disappointed, and drew a sour face over it for a moment, but soon the sound of voices drew his attention and gave him something else to think about.

The voices seemed to come from an adjoining room, and Paddy stepped to the wall to listen to ascertain, if possible, who was talking. He heard Mr. Cutter's voice and knew that the next room must be Miss Greenbough's.

He could not distinguish what was being said.

Near at hand was a door, and he cautiously tried that to see where it led to. It opened into a deep closet, and as it opened the sound of the voices became quite distinct.

Paddy entered the closet and pressed his ear to the wall.

"Yes, it is very mysterious," he heard Cutter saying. "Miss Greenbough will not believe Sullivan guilty, although all the proof is against him."

"No, I cannot, I will not believe him guilty," the wounded girl declared. "I have done many kindnesses for him, and I cannot believe him such a heartless villain."

"He certainly must have been out of his mind," said Silver Sallie.

"Which is quite likely," agreed Cutter. "He was in a towering rage when he left the mine, and the threats he made were something horrible to hear."

"No, no, I cannot believe it of him," Miss Greenbough defended.

"Then, as I said, it is very mysterious," said Cutter. "There is no other way of explaining it."

"You certainly had no enemy, dear," said Silver Sallie.

"I did not know that I had."

"And the proofs against that man are so positive. Leaving everything else out of the question, the testimony of Plug Seely alone—"

"I would not believe him on his oath," Laura interrupted. "He is a rascal though and through!"

"Do you think he can have done it?" asked Cutter.

"No, no, I would not think that of him, for I have given him aid more than once, rascal that he is. No, no. I cannot believe that it was any one here in Poker Pocket at all."

"You think it was a stranger, then?"

"It must have been."

"But the motive?"

"Ah! that is what puzzles me. I cannot think of one."

They were then silent for a few moments, as if pondering, and Cutter was the one to speak next.

"Well, if you ladies will excuse me," he said, "I will take leave of you and let you enjoy a chat. There is work to be done if we are going to solve the mystery."

"You will come back again soon?" asked Laura.

"As soon as I can."

"Very well."

Paddy heard him leave the room and close the door, and immediately Silver Sallie exclaimed, in a most fervid tone:

"Oh! darling! I am so glad that you were not killed! Do you know, it would have killed me, too? You will live and get well, and you will be happy all your life, while I—"

"You will be happy, too, I hope, Sallie."

"No, no; that is not for me."

"You do not know."

"Yes, I know all too well. Oh! if you could only realize how I love you!"

"I am glad to know that you do," said Laura. "I appreciate it, I assure you, and I think a great deal of you in return."

"Begorra!" Paddy exclaimed to himself, "there is no room to suspect dhat gal av any part in dhe murtherin' business. She t'inks too much av Laura to harrum wan hair av her head, God bless her!"

"And why will you not listen to my request?" Silver Sallie asked.

"It is impossible, it is folly," said the wounded girl.

"No, no! It is possible, it is right!"

"No, it can never be."

"Laura, you will kill me, kill me!" with a despairing moan. "If you only knew, if you could only feel—"

She broke down.

"Phwat dhe divil does all dhat mane?" asked Paddy of himself. "Begorra, it stumps me entirely, so et does!"

"Sallie, listen to me," said Laura. "You must never mention this matter again. If you do, it is certain to ruin our friendship."

"And if I do not, it is certain to ruin my life!" cried the other. "What excuse will you make for yourself, when you learn that I have given my life for you, Laura?"

"You will do nothing so foolish!"

"It will kill me."

The listener was filled with wonder and amazement at what he heard.

"Begorra, can it be dhat she loves Cutter, and wants Laura to be afther givin' av him up to her?" he asked himself.

"Sallie, you must never, never speak of this again," the wounded girl said, now severely. "Suppose you were to be overheard, what would be thought? If it were that you loved Edwin, then—"

"I hate him—hate him!" was said fiercely.

"And yet you would not harm him—"

"No, no, for your sake."

"I wish it were possible, Sallie, but what you ask can never be, so pray do not speak of it any more."

Paddy McCrum was puzzled more than ever as he listened, and the matter was

now in such a jumble in his mind that he hardly knew what it was he was trying to ferret out.

Only a few words more were said, and he heard Silver Sallie take her departure.

Paddy quickly got out of the closet.

In a few moments Kitty opened the door and beckoned to him, and he was conducted into Miss Greenbough's room.

"So you came to see me, eh?" the wounded young lady cheerfully greeted him from the bed where she lay. "I am glad you thought of me, Paddy."

"Begorra, Miss Laura, how could wan help thinkin' about ye, afther dhe close call fur yure loife ye have had?" cried Paddy. "Sure, it is happy Oi am dhat ye are alive, so Oi am."

"Well, I am somewhat grateful myself, Paddy."

"Oi bela've ye. And is it thrue dhat ye don't know who it was thried to do ye up in dhat dirty fashion?"

"It is true that I have no idea who it was that attempted my life, Paddy," was the earnest response. "If I did, I assure you I would not hesitate in making him known."

"Well, Oi am going to foind out who it was, dhat is to say, Pomp and Pretzel and mesel', and dhe Lord help him whin we git onto him! Av ye don't moind, dhere is a question or two Oi would loike to be askin' av ye, dhat may be av some help in dhe matter."

"So you are going to be my detectives, are you? Well, anything that I can do to help you I will do cheerfully."

"You don't bela've dhat Sid Sullivan done et?"

"No, I do not, Paddy."

"Well, naythur do Oi, so we are agreed upon dhat point. Now, did you see anything av a young man around here dhis morning before it happened?" And he gave the description.

The young lady seemed to pale, but she firmly responded:

"I did not, Paddy."

"Well, do ye know any such young man?"

"No, Paddy, I do not. You are talking in riddles entirely."

"Well, dhen, did ye ever see a button dhe loikes av dhat wan before?" and he held up the button he had found.

At sight of it the girl gave a slight cry, and for an instant covered her face with her hands. The next moment she made a snatch at the button, and, had Paddy not been quick, would have had it out of his hand.

"Where did you get it?" she asked, excitedly. "Tell me, tell me, where did you find that button, Paddy?"

CHAPTER XIII.

PADDY McCRUM WORSE PUZZLED.

Paddy McCrum was somewhat excited himself.

It was plain that Miss Greenbough recognized the button, and that being the case, she must know to whom it belonged.

And, knowing to whom it belonged, she would, of course, as she had declared, make known who that person was, and there would be an end of the whole matter, perhaps.

"Where did you get it, I ask you?" the girl impatiently repeated, as Paddy did not answer promptly.

"Oi found it," was the answer.

"Where?"

"Under dhe window phwere you were stabbed."

"Merciful Heavens! Is it possible? Paddy, give me that button at once, and you must never mention—"

"Begorra, it is too much ye are askin'," declared Paddy, interrupting. "Oi have

here a clew to dhe wan dhat jabbed dhe knife into ye, Miss Laura, and Oi am goin' to bring dhe spalpeen to justice—"

"No, no; you must not, you must not!"

Paddy's eyes flew open wide with amazement.

"Oi must not!" he cried.

"No, no!"

"And phwy not?"

"Because I ask you not to. Paddy, I will give you a hundred dollars for that button, if you will not mention to any one that you have found such a button."

"It is too late ye are, Miss Laura, aven av Oi would do it, and Oi wouldn't dhat same, wi'd Sid Sullivan in jail wi'd dhe rope almost around his neck. Begorra, it is askin' too much entirely ye are!"

She covered her face with her hands and moaned.

"My God! what am I to do?" she cried, throwing out her arms the next moment.

"Oi'll tell ye phwat is dhe best t'ing you can do," Paddy suggested.

"Tell me, tell me!"

"Make a clane breast av dhe whole business to your father—"

"No, no! Impossible, impossible! Paddy, you must help me to keep this matter secret—"

"Oi tell ye it is too late ye are," said Paddy. "Oi have showed the button to Pomp and Pretzel, and to Big Bill besides, and dhey are on dhe war-path as big as Injuns!"

"But they cannot get at the truth; no, no; they cannot get at the truth. I can block their way, thank Heavens!"

"And w'u'd ye have Sid Sullivan rot in jail?" asked Paddy.

"No, no; he is innocent, and I will declare him so. He will be set free. Paddy, touch the bell and summon Kitty."

"But, Miss Laura, Oi w'u'd have further talk wi'd ye—"

"Not another word! Touch the bell."

There was no evading the order, and Paddy obeyed it.

In a moment Kitty came hastily into the room, and at sight of Miss Greenbough's face a look of alarm came over her own.

"Are you worse?" she asked.

"No, no; but I want papa, as quick as possible."

"Yes, ma'am."

She was off in an instant.

"And phwat about me?" asked Paddy.

"Are ye goin' to have me killed?"

"No, not so bad as that, Paddy. But will you not promise me that you will give up the matter and let it drop, for my sake?"

"And I've Sullivan—"

"I will see that he is freed, Paddy."

"Then ye know who it was dhat jammed the knife into ye—"

"Yes, yes; I know now, Paddy, and I must save—must save him from the law."

"And is the spalpeen still at large?"

"Yes, he is."

"And he may thry it again—"

"I believe that it may be tried again, Paddy; it is that I want to see papa for."

"Thin, be Hivvins, Oi will not grant ye phwat ye ask, you bet! Av yure loife is in danger, begorra it is Paddy McCrum and his pair av pards dhat will stand by ye to dhe end!"

"Yes, you may aid in protecting me, but you must not try to discover—"

"No use, Miss Laura, not a bit av use; Oi will have dhe spalpeen out av his hole av Oi have to ferret him out all alone."

At that moment Mr. Greenbough hastily entered the room.

"What is it, my child?" he asked.

"What has happened? What do you want with me?"

"Papa, papa, you must protect my life until we are able to travel, and we must

then go East immediately, and secretly. Put some one here to guard me every moment!"

"Why, my child, are you out of your mind?"

"No, no; I know what I am saying. I know now who it was attempted my life, papa."

"You know him? Then all you have got to do is to name the wretch, and by Joshua he will be put where he will not harm any one, you can rest assured! Who was it?"

"Papa, I cannot tell you—"

"You cannot tell! What are you thinking about? Your life attempted, you know who did it, and yet you will not tell. You must be crazy."

"No, no. I am not crazy, believe me. And I have proof that Sullivan is innocent, so please have him released at once. But, first of all, put a man here in the hall to guard me!"

Mr. Greenbough passed his hand over his forehead in a dazed manner.

"This is too much, too much," he muttered. "Why should any one attempt your life, my child?"

"I cannot tell you, oh! I cannot tell you, papa!"

"Then you have some secret, there is something in which you are mixed up, so that you are bound?"

"No, no, nothing of that kind; I would spare the person who tried to kill me, that is all. I am innocent of anything wrong myself, I assure you that I am, my papa!"

Mr. Greenbough paced up and down the room.

Suddenly he seemed to think of something, and stopped before Paddy and demanded:

"What do you know about this, boy? I believe you are the one who has informed my child of something she did not know before. What do you know?"

"Begorra, it is as much in the dark as ye are ye'rsel' Oi am," Paddy declared. "Sure, Oi am all tied up in a double-bow knot wi'd the puzzle, so Oi am, and divil a bit can Oi untie it, aythur!"

"Laura, I command you to tell me all!"

"Papa, I cannot; if you kill me I cannot!"

"And yet you tell me that your life is still in danger! Girl, you are out of your mind!"

"No, no, I am sane enough, papa. Do as I ask you, and do not press me for my reason. What I do I do for the best, as you ought to know."

"I know that if the assassin who tried to kill you is at large, he has got to be discovered, and when discovered, it is going to go hard with him, that is what I know."

"But you will protect me, as I asked of you?"

"Yes, of course; I will put Tom Peters here on guard at your door, to act under your orders."

"That is all I can ask, papa. Leave the rest to me. And you, Paddy, I beg you to do what I have asked. If you knew all, you would certainly be glad to do it."

"Begorra, it is doin' as Oi have declared Oi'll be!" cried Paddy.

There was more said, but no new point was brought out. The girl maintained the utmost secrecy, and her father could not break down her will.

Mr. Greenbough and Paddy left the house together, the man Peters having been sent for to protect Laura from further danger, and Mr. Greenbough tried to force Paddy to tell what he knew, but the lad was not yet ready to divulge, so would not.

Finally the mine manager allowed him to go, when he ran off to fall in with his two pards and Big Bill.

CHAPTER XIV.

LAURA'S QUEER COURSE.

"I don't know what is it der matter vas, Dot I so mournful-like peen;
A leedle story fun dem olden times,
Das kommt mir nicht—"

"Whoap! Hol' on d'ar', yo' Pretzel! Don' yo' know d'at yo' hab' switched off inter Dutch? Yo' was doin' bully, till yo' come to d'at d'ar place. Yo' will soon git so's yo' kin sing d'at song in United States, ef yo' stick to!"

"Id vas no use, Pomp, id vas no use," Pretzel complained. "Vhen you take away der Dutch you takes away all der music, und id vas no goot. You see, d'ere vas no vords in der United States like vhat d'ere vas in Deutsch, und you can't make id coom oudt righdt."

The real trouble was, Pretzel was not equal to the task that Pomp had set for him. Uneducated in his native tongue, and having but a smattering of commonest English, what was to be expected?

"D'at am all right," encouraged Pomp. "Yo' jes' git d'e words down fine, an' d'en we done see 'bout d'e music, you bet!"

About that time Paddy McCrum came upon them.

"Hullo!" cried Pomp. "Heah yo' is, huh? What am d'e bes' word?"

"Begorra, we are in a puddle ov puzzle clear up to our chins, Pompey," declared the Irish lad.

"How am d'at?"

Paddy told them what he had learned.

"Py chimminy cheesevax!" cried Pretzel. "Id vas enough to make a veller go righdt oudt und hang himself, maype!"

"Yo's mo'n haff right, Pretzel," declared Pomp. "What fo' d'e lan' ob goodness am we gwine do now? Hit am all twisted 'n' tangled wuss'n a bushel ob worms fo' bait."

"Phwere's Big Bill?" asked Paddy.

He was told.

"Well, Oi am goin' to report to him, an' dhen we'll have to git right up an' hump ourselves!"

Accordingly, Big Bill was looked up, and when the facts had been laid before him he was as much puzzled as the three pards, if not indeed more. He caught at one point, however.

"We wur' right regardin' Sid Sullivan," he exclaimed. "They have got to let Sid out of ther calaboose now!"

"D'ot vas righdt!" agreed Pretzel.

"But I can't get it through my hair," declared Big Bill, scratching his head vigorously. "If ther gal knows who done et, and thinks et will be tried again, why don't she blow out on der cuss?"

"D'at am what's d'e mattah!" cried Pomp.

"An' dhat's what dhe puzzle is," said Paddy. "But we will have him out of his hole in spite of all, see if we don't."

"I am goin' ter see Cutter," declared Big Bill.

"What fo'?" asked Pomp.

"Ter see ef he can't shed some light on this business."

"Then we'll go with ye," said Paddy. "We are all into it, and we must get out togedder."

They set off to the mine office, where Mr. Greenbough had gone, and where they understood Cutter was at that time, and reaching there, they found those two in earnest consultation.

"You are just the fellows we want to see," cried Cutter, when they entered. "We want to know everything that you know."

"Which ain't much," declared Big Bill. "I have come hyar to learn more."

"How do you expect to learn it?"

"By axin' questions. In ther first place, seems ter me you must have a rival

in ther field fer Miss Greenbough's hand, haven't ye?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Well, ye have heard about what Mother Goose told me, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Who was that feller?"

"How should I know?"

"If ye don't, we must find out."

"Which I am only anxious enough to do. And now," turning upon Paddy, "we want to know what it was that Miss Greenbough wanted you to drop, my lad."

"And it is dhat same dhat Oi can't tell ye," Paddy answered.

"The deuce you can't! Why not?"

"Because it is a clew to dhe murtherin' villain dhat thried to kill dhe young lady, and wanst it is known dhe rascal will block me game."

"Well, don't you suppose that we are interested in finding him? If it is a clew, let us have the benefit of it, for we are all working with one object in view. No danger of it's leaking out."

"Ah, I see how it is," said Mr. Greenbough.

"What do you see?" asked Cutter.

"The reward I have offered."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Why, the boys are after that, don't you see?"

"Begorra, Oi never t'ought wanst about dhe reward!" exclaimed Paddy. "On me wurrud Oi did not; Oi was t'inkin' ownly about dhe gossoon gettin' wind av it and blockin' me game."

"How could he do that?"

"'Asy; but Oi can't tell ye wi'dout givin' dhe whole business away."

"You must tell us," urged Mr. Greenbough. "We must all work to get at the truth of the matter. If you have a clue, and it leads to the discovery of the rascal, you shall have the reward—"

"Oi tell ye, sor, dhat it is not dhe reward dhat is k'apin' it back. Big Bill, phwat do ye t'ink?"

"Ye had better tell, I think," said Bill.

"Well, Oi will, and ye promise dhat ye will kape it mum as a mouse—"

"It will be to our interest to keep the secret close," said Cutter. "Out with it, my lad."

Paddy scratched his head hard before he would make the revelation. He was thinking hard what would be for the best interest of all concerned, as far as he was able to think it out.

"No, begorra, Oi won't," he decided, flatly. "It won't help ye wan bit to know it. All yez have got to do is to look fur dhe spalpeen dhat Mother Goose saw, and vhin he has been found, dhen it will be toime enough fur me to put on dhe little joker. Ain't dhat roight, Big Bill?"

"No, it is not right!" cried Cutter. "You have no business to keep anything back from us."

"Oi am doin' av it with good intint," asserted Paddy.

"D'at d'ar' am straight goods," averred Pomp.

"Yaw, d'ot vas righdt," chimed in Pretzel. "Paddy knows vhat he vas talking apoudt, you pet!"

"If you won't tell, Big Bill can, for it seems he knows," said Mr. Greenbough.

"Nary," said Bill. "It is ther boy's own deal, and if he thinks best to make it a blind, a blind it is—see? Paddy is no fool, Mr. Greenbough."

"Well, I don't know what to make of it," Mr. Greenbough growled. "There is my daughter, with her life at stake, and she will not expose the rascal, and here is this boy with a clew, and he will do nothing."

"Dhat is where ye make yure mistake, Mr. Greenbough," cried Paddy. "You just hold on a little, and see phwat Oi will do."

And you can have dhat two t'ousand ready fur me and me pards whin we bring dhe rascal in on a stretcher, begob! We are on dhe war-path, you bet!"

With that Paddy McCrum and his pards took leave, and Big Bill soon followed them from the office.

The mystery was deeper than ever now.

And so it remained. Sid Sullivan was released from custody upon affidavit made by the wounded young woman that she knew he was innocent, and Sid took up the trail with Big Bill.

Sullivan was furious, for he had had a close call for his life. If the attempted assassination had been a success he would have been lynched as surely as it had happened. The first thing he did was to give Plug Seely a sound drubbing and make him confess that he had lied.

Seely hated Sullivan, and, seeing what a tight box Sid was in, he thought that he could finish him off by making such a declaration against him. At any rate, that was his confession, and the result was that he himself was lodged in the jail upon suspicion that he knew more than he was willing to tell. That, however, the fellow stoutly denied.

The question was, Who was the guilty man?

CHAPTER XV.

PADDY McCRUM TAKES A TUMBLE.

Days passed.

The mystery remained.

Laura Greenbough was out of danger, and was up and around the house.

The man Peters was still kept there on guard, with another man to relieve him at stated periods.

It was noticed that the young lady took the utmost care not to expose herself to another attack, and for that reason it was thought that the assassin must be constantly near at hand.

But who it could be no one could guess.

Father and lover had pleaded with her to reveal the person's name, using every means possible to entrap her, but all to no purpose.

Paddy, Pomp and Pretzel had been constantly on the alert, and Big Bill and Sid Sullivan were tireless in their efforts, but they appeared to be making no headway.

All others had dropped out of the race for the reward.

Every night, secretly, Mr. Greenbough stationed an extra guard around his house.

After what had happened he could not feel safe a moment until the matter had been cleared up, or until his daughter herself gave him some word that further danger was past.

The time set for the wedding of Laura and Edwin Cutter had now passed.

Laura had insisted upon a postponement, saying that she would not take the risk of appearing in public.

It was suggested that the wedding be made quite private, but she declared that it could not be made private enough to exclude the danger, and this served to add to the puzzle.

Cutter believed that he had a rival in the field, but he could not discover who it was.

This, however, the young lady declared was not the case; no other man was in love with her, so far as she was aware. And yet she kept close the secret of which she was the only guardian.

Paddy had made friends with Mother Goose.

He hoped that through her he might be able to get some clew to the man she had seen.

The old woman had never seen him again, however, though there was no variation in the story she had at first told concerning him.

Paddy had the description down so fine that he knew he could recognize the man at sight, should he ever see him, but it did not appear likely that he would ever be favored.

The Irish lad hung around the hotel a good part of his time. It was there that Mother Goose had seen the mysterious man last, when he entered by the rear way on that eventful morning, and there was no proof that he had ever come out again. It was certain that no one else had seen him.

Paddy had shadowed every man who frequented the place, that is to say, every one who could possibly have filled the description given by Mother Goose, but all in vain.

Still he did not give up.

One day he walked out in the direction of the Greenbough residence, and saw Miss Greenbough sitting on the piazza.

He went forward and entered the yard and asked after her health, and she greeted him pleasantly, answering his inquiry, and invited him to come up on the piazza and sit down.

Paddy was willing enough to do that, considering that there was an attraction in the cottage for him.

"I want to talk with you, Paddy," the lady said.

"All roight. Oi'm willing ye should, ma'am."

"You have never been able to make any use of the button you found, have you?"

"It is roight ye are, ma'am. Oi never have, so far," acknowledged Paddy.

"And you never will."

"Oi don't know about dhat same."

"No?"

"Oi do not give it up by any manes."

"You might as well now. You can never make any use of it, Paddy."

"Phwy not?"

"Well, perhaps the person is no longer here."

"Oi know betther dhan dhat."

"How do you know?"

"Begorra, av he was gone, ye would not have Tom Peters guardin' av yure loife every hour in dhe day."

"Oh, that is papa's doings—"

"Yis, Oi know all about dhat, ma'am. Yure father made no bones about telling it was at your request."

"Well, well! It is no use your trying to play the detective any longer, Paddy, for it is a secret that can never come out until I am ready to reveal it, which I may do some time."

Paddy made a bold dash.

"D'ye know what Ed Cutter t'inks?" he demanded.

"What does he think, Paddy?"

"Well, it is delicate fur me to be sayin', but he t'inks you are goin' back on him—dhat you love another man."

The young woman flushed.

"Pshaw! He knows better than that, Paddy."

"Oi don't know phwy he should, ma'am. Ye have put off dhe weddin', and ye won't tell who it was thried to murther ye. It looks loike it was another lover."

"Nonsense, Paddy!"

"Ye can say dhat, but, begorra, av Oi was Cutter ye would make a clane confession av dhe whole matther, or dhere w'u'd be two av us!"

At that bold assertion the young woman slightly paled.

"You only think so, Paddy," she declared. "If you were Mr. Cutter you would do just as he does, I fancy. But, rest easy, for there is no other man in the case. That I declare."

"Dhen Mother Goose must have been ddreaming dhat morning."

"Oh! I do not say that; she may have seen a man, just as she says, but I know

nothing about any man in the matter. What I am keeping back is something entirely different."

"Well, it is your own funeral, Oi suppose," Paddy concluded. "By dhe way, Oi t'ink Oi will mope, for here comes a caller."

Silver Sallie was approaching from the direction of the hotel.

Miss Greenbough looked up, and, seeing who it was, seemed to give a start, and she certainly paled.

Paddy noticed it, and wondered at it, but said nothing. Laura looked around hurriedly, as if for some one, and clutched Paddy's arm as he rose to take his leave.

"No, don't go," she said. "I want you here. I want to talk with you further after she has gone."

"But she may object to my prisince," said Paddy. "Oi t'ink Oi will mope. Oi can come again, ye know. Besides, Oi want to see Pomp and Pretzel—"

"No, I want you to stay here. Sit down there in that chair; I do not think she will stay long."

Paddy sat down, trying to get through his head what it meant.

He had noticed that Tom Peters was not in sight just at that moment, and it had struck him that it was for him that the lady had looked around.

And if that was the case, was it of Silver Sallie that she stood in fear? But, no, that could not be, for they were good friends, and certainly Sallie could have had no hand in the attempt upon her life.

In another moment Silver Sallie entered the yard and approached the piazza.

"I am so glad to see you out," she exclaimed, and running up the steps she greeted Laura with a passionate kiss.

"I am glad enough to be out, too," Laura assured her. "I am glad you have come to see me, for I wanted to talk with you. Sit here close by me, please."

Then began a conversation which Paddy could not overhear, but by watching the faces of the two young women, he could tell that it was of some import, especially to Silver Sallie.

Paddy pretended to be paying no attention, and he was eating his head, almost, because he was not able to overhear what was being said. Finally, they appeared to finish the matter, and Laura turned to Paddy, and, to his immense surprise, said:

"Paddy, please show Silver Sallie that button, for she thinks possibly she may be able to help you."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH PADDY PLAYS A TRUMP.

Paddy McCrum had a thought instantly.

Like a revelation something popped into his mind, and he believed that he had a key to the situation.

But there was one thing that stood in his way, and that was what the motive for the crime could have been. He believed that Silver Sallie was the one who had tried to kill Laura!

At that time he could not prove it to himself, but the suspicion was there, nevertheless.

Miss Greenbough had refused to make known even to her father what she knew, and had tried to dissuade Paddy from trying to push the investigation further, and yet here she had asked him to show the button clew to Silver Sallie.

And her manner of asking it, as if she herself had all along been anxious to have the guilty one exposed and brought to justice. If she wanted to keep it secret, why should she want the girl sport to know anything about that button? And yet, to offset that, they were the best of friends.

Paddy, however, recalled the conversa-

tion he had overheard on another occasion.

What did it mean?

Paddy had his wits about him instantly.

"Oi want none av dhe lady's help, however, Miss Laura," he said. "Sure, it is mesel' and me pards dhat is afther dhat reward."

"Why, to be sure," spoke up Silver Sallie. "What were you thinking about, Laura? You could not expect him to take me into his secret, even if by so doing I might find the man he is looking for."

"I did not think of that."

"And phwy should ye want Silver Sallie to help me to undo phwat ye don't want undone?" demanded the Irish lad.

The two women glanced at each other, and Laura was somewhat confused for the moment. She seemed to have forgotten the role she was playing in the mysterious affair.

"Perhaps I have changed my mind," she said.

"Begorra, av dhat is dhe case ye have only to tell phwat ye know, and dhe mystery will be cleared up in no time!"

The women looked at each other again.

Paddy felt sure that he was on the point of discovering something, but he could not be sure what it was.

"Can you not understand," spoke Silver Sallie, pleasantly, "what Miss Greenbough is unwilling to do herself, for good reasons perhaps, she is willing that her friends should do for her."

This threw in a new light.

"Oh! dhat is dhe way of it, eh? Dhen it is ye'rsel' has convinced her dhat it is roight she should."

"Well, she has listened to me, that I will admit. She has told me all about the button you found and the story told by Mother Goose, and I have an interest in seeing the danger removed."

"Well, since ye know about dhe button, it can't do any harm to show it to ye, Oi suppose," assented Paddy, and he took the button from his pocket and held it up to view.

"Let me take it in my hand," requested Sallie, holding out her hand for it.

Paddy thought with lightning quickness. If he refused, it would be to show where his suspicion lay, and that might spoil everything, if that suspicion was all right.

He allowed her to take the button.

"No, I never saw buttons like it, Laura," she avowed, handing it back again to Paddy. "I am afraid that I can be of no help."

"I did not believe you could be, much as you have coaxed me," said Laura. "It must rest as it is, for, of course, I can never reveal what I know, and thus expose one for whom—"

She stopped short.

"I understand," suggested Sallie. "The guilty man is one who has done you a favor in the past, perhaps, and you would spare him. It is noble of you, and the wretch would be a wretch indeed not to appreciate it. Have you given him warning to get away?"

"I have shown him his danger," admitted Laura. "He must choose for himself. I have done all I can."

"Noble heart!" the other exclaimed.

Little further was said and Silver Sallie rose to take her leave.

Miss Greenbough put out her arms to her as she did so, and they embraced, with fond kisses, after which Sallie hastened away.

Paddy was puzzled more than ever.

By this time Tom Peters was on hand again, sitting on the end of the piazza.

"Well, Miss Laura, phwat is it you want of me?" asked Paddy.

"I want to ask a favor of you, Paddy."

"What is it?"

"That you give me that button, and let the matter drop for all time."

"And lose the reward?"

"I will ask papa to give you the money."

"And d'ye suppose he is soft enough to do it till Oi have earned it?"

"Then I will give it to you, myself, as soon as I come into my rights, and you will not have to wait long."

"Is dhe danger all over, dhen?"

"Yes."

"Here is dhe button, dhen, for it is of no use to me now, Oi don't want it," and, tossing it into her lap, he turned away, saying that he would go and call off his dogs.

But he had no intention of allowing the game to escape; the Irish lad had played a trump card.

From there he went straight to the mine, where he hunted up Cutter.

"What is it, Paddy?" Cutter asked, seeing, by the lad's looks, that something had taken place.

"Sure, Oi am onto it, now!"

"Ha! is that so?"

Cutter was all interest instantly.

"Bet yure swate loife it is!" asserted Paddy.

"Well, explain, my lad, and let me into the thing with you."

"No, I am not quite ready to do that, but Oi have a trump card dhat Oi want ye to play fur me."

"What is it?"

"Ye have rayson to bela've dhat Miss Greenbough loves ye?"

"The best of reasons, my boy. What are you driving at? You are speaking in riddles."

"Sure, it is nothing but riddles we have had fur a good many days past, Mr. Cutter. We have had quite enough av thim, Oi am thinking. We must get at dhe answers."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Oi want ye to bring t'ings to a focus wi'd Miss Greenbough."

"What in the world are you talking about? What in the mischief do you mean, Paddy?"

"Oi mane just dhis: She is not using ye roight, and ye must kick. She has put off dhe weddin', wi'd no rayson given, and ye have a roight to t'ink dhat she is in love wi'd some wan else."

Cutter flushed, then paled.

"Do you know anything of that kind?" he demanded.

"Sure, Oi do not, and you do not know dhat it ain't so, Oi reckon. Oi am going to prove it."

"How?"

"Oi will tell ye: Dhe lady loves ye, and av she t'ought dhere was danger av losin' ye she would tell phwat she knows in a hurry, Oi am thinkin'. Can't ye give her a scare?"

"Ha! I think I see what you are getting at. You want me to pretend that I am angry, and force her to show her hand, eh? I have been thinking about that same thing, but thought it rather rough. The fact is, she has begged off so hard that I had not the heart to do it."

"Well, begorra, ye must harden ye'r heart and push dhe matther."

"I'll do it."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PARDS SET A SNARE.

"I don't know, what id was der matter is, D'ot I vas so down in der mout'; A leedle tale of der goot old days, In my mind what I can't make out."

"D'at am fine, Pretzel, d'at am fine!" applauded Pomp. "Yo' is boun' to get d'ar' ef yo' done stick to, shua! Yo' grows bettah as yo' improves, bery fast!"

"Id may pe all right for you," re-

minded Pretzel, mournfully, "but id vas no goot vor me. United States vas not half so goot as Cherman, und id don't make sense when I sing id d'ot vay. Besides, id knocks der tune all oudt, und you can't make id right nohow."

"Nebber yo' min' 'bout d'at, Pretzel. It makes mo' sense to me d'an what d'e Dutch does, and I want yo' to sing in United States ebery time; yo' heah? Say, how many mo' verses to d'at song?"

"'Pout five more."

"Good! Yo' hab' got a whole summer's job befo' yo', shua. Hello! heah comes d'at boy, Paddy O'Whack, like he vas comin' on biz!"

"Yaw, yaw; d'ot vas so, I dinks."

"Phwat are yez doin'?" queried Paddy, on coming up.

"Golly! yo' done missed it!" asserted Pomp.

"How is dhat?" asked Paddy.

"Pretzel hab' jes' done sing one whole verse in United States!"

"Bully fer you, Pretzel! I'll hear it mesel', some time. But come: we have a cartload of business on hand."

"Vhat vas d'ot?"

"Begorra, Sourcrout, Oi t'ink Oi have me eyes open at last, and av we are smart we are goin' to gobble up dhe person dhat jabbed dhe knife into Miss Greenbough. Mum is dhe word!"

"Golly! d'at am bully!" cried Pomp.

"Pet your poots id vas!"

"What am we to do?" asked Pomp.

"Dhat's phwat Oi'm going to tell ye, me ebony brunette," and forthwith the Irish pard let them into his plans in full, and both became highly elated at the prospect ahead.

"We am gwine win d'at money, shua!" avowed Pomp.

"Ich werde reich sein!" asserted Pretzel. "D'ot vas pooly, aind't id?"

"No more av yure Dutch!" protested Paddy. "Tend to business, now. Pomp, you see this note?"

"Shua! Wha' for is my eyes?"

"Well, you are to take it to Miss Greenbough."

"D'at am easy as eatin' candy!"

"Well, you hear phwat Oi have to say: She will send an answer roight back, Oi am t'inkin'. Av she don't, you must come at wanst and let me know phwat she said."

"Yes; d'at I will!"

"She may send answer to dhis wan, and at dhe same toime want to send wan to Silver Sallie, also."

"I's aboard, Paddy."

"Well, if she does, Pretzel will be near and you can send dhe wan to Silver Sallie by him. See?"

"Shua I does."

"Pretzel, you will hang around in sight phwere Pomp kin see ye."

"Yaw, yaw; d'ot vas all right."

"Oi will go to dhe hotel. If you get a not for Silver Sallie, bring it straight to me; do you savvy?"

"Yaw, yaw; d'ot vas so blain as night, maype!"

"All right; Oi know phwat you mane even if you don't say phwat ye mane. Off wi'd ye, now!"

And off they were at once.

Paddy betook himself to the hotel, where he looked up Big Bill and had a chat with him. As a result, Bill went off for an interview with Mother Goose, the Swedish woman.

Pomp and Pretzel kept together until they drew near to the cottage; there Pretzel dropped behind and Pomp went on.

He found Miss Greenbough on the piazza, with Tom Peters not far away.

The darky ran in and delivered the message.

Paddy's Trump Card.

The moment the young woman read it her face became deathly white, and for a moment she pressed her hand to her breast as if she felt herself fainting.

"Wait!" she said to Pomp. "I must answer this at once. And, I must send another, too. Where is Paddy?"

"Pretzel am not far off, ma'am, if he will do," informed the darky.

"Yes, yes; he will do."

"Shall I call him, ma'am?"

"Yes; but first go in and ask Kitty to bring my writing box here."

The young lady showed considerable agitation. She read the note through once more when Pomp had gone into the house. It ran thus:

"Dearest:—I can bear it no longer. You must confess all to me, or we must part forever. If you want to see my face again, answer this and say that you will explain everything. EDWIN."

No wonder the message moved her.

Pomp was back again in a few moments, bringing Kitty with him, she bearing the writing box.

Laura hastened to write two notes. While she was thus engaged Pomp signaled for Pretzel to come up, and the German boy was soon on hand ready for his part in the scheme.

The young lady sealed and addressed the notes, one to Cutter and the other to Silver Sallie.

"Which will you take, Pomp?" she asked, stating who they were for.

"D'e one to Mistah Cutter, ef yo' please," Pomp answered. "I's gwine make shua ob d'e qua'tah he done promised me."

"All right, then; be off with it. And you, Pretzel, take this to Silver Sallie, at the hotel, and here is a quarter for you. Take care that the note falls into no other hands."

"Yaw, yaw; d'ot vas all righdt," acquiesced the German.

He and Pomp set off together, but parted at the gate, one going in one direction and one in the other.

When they had departed, the young lady rose and entered the house, telling Kitty that she would see no one—absolutely no one, and giving Peters orders to be doubly watchful until he heard from her again.

That Peters promised to do, though he wondered greatly what was the reason for it.

Pomp made haste in the delivery of the note intrusted to him.

He found Cutter awaiting his coming.

The mine superintendent took the missive and hastily opened it, reading the following:

"Dear Edwin: Give me only forty-eight hours, and I will tell everything, and you will then see that I have suffered as well as you. You will say that I have done right, I know. At the end of that time come. LAURA."

"Paddy was right," Cutter admitted to himself. "That boy has an idea or two in his head."

"Yo' can jes' bet yo' life he hab!" emphasized Pomp, who overheard.

"Heard that, did you? Well, I mean it. By the way, what did the lady say when she got my note?"

"Why, boss, she done turn sort ob sea-green yaller, an' put her han' up so-fashion, an' I done fink she was gwine flop, shua, but she didn't. D'en she hustle to send d'e answer."

"Good enough, and Paddy was right."

"What 'bout d'at qua'tah, boss?" Pomp reminded.

"Oh, sure enough; I did promise that. Here it is, Pomp!"

Pomp pocketed the silver and made

haste to the hotel, where Paddy was already playing his part of the game.

When Pretzel reached the hotel he found Paddy and gave the message to him, and Paddy undertook to carry it up to Silver Sallie's room. He found her in, and she was surprised to see him.

"A note for me?" she said.

"Dhis is dhe proof av it, mum," and Paddy handed it to her.

"And who is it from?"

"Miss Greenbough."

At mention of the name Silver Sallie flushed and invited Paddy in, as she made haste to open the envelope. One glance at the missive, and she grew white to the lips and sank down upon a chair, almost overcome.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WONDERFUL DENOUEMENT.

The Irish lad pretended not to notice anything, but stood by respectfully, twirling his hat in his hands, pretending to look out the window.

"When did the lady write this?" Silver Sallie asked, when she had read the note through for the second or third time. "What did she say when she sent it to me, Paddy?"

"She wrote it only a minute ago, and said bring it roight ter you," was the answer.

"And she sends me that button you found."

"Yis; so Oi see."

"You gave it to her, then, of course?"

"Yis, ma'am. She begged so hard for it dhat Oi couldn't refuse, ma'am."

"She is good, she is good! How can I refuse what she asks? And yet—and yet, how can I grant it?"

"Av Oi knew phwat it is she's afther askin' av yè," suggested Paddy, "maybe Oi could answer dhe question fur ye, but, as it is, Oi am all in dhe dark."

"No matter, no matter. I was speaking to myself, not to you."

"Oh, dhat is a horse av another color, dhen."

"I will go and see her—I must go and see her at once," the woman exclaimed, in haste. "There is no answer, Paddy."

"All roight, ma'am."

Paddy bowed and went out, and the moment he closed the door a grin lighted up his homely face as he murmured:

"Begorra, it works!"

He made haste to rejoin Pomp and Pretzel, and together they waited for the woman to leave the hotel.

This she soon did, setting off in the direction of the Greenbough residence, and no sooner was she out than the trio of pards slipped in by the rear way and made their way to her room.

It had been their dread that they should find the door locked, but fortune favored them; in her haste and trepidation the door was left unlocked.

Entering, they closed the door after them, and Pomp and Pretzel stood by in a timid manner, for they were in a place where they had no business as a matter of fact.

"Kape yure eyes peeled now, dhe while Oi look around," Paddy ordered, when he had closed the door. "Av yez see dhe woman returning, begorra we will get out av dhis loike dhe ould divil himsel' was afther us wi'd his pitchfork! Manetoime Oi will search."

Pomp and Pretzel stationed themselves near the windows, where they could watch the street, and Paddy began investigation.

There was a closet in the room, a bureau and a trunk.

These three places claimed his attention, and he tried the trunk first. That was locked. Turning from that to the closet,

he looked there, but did not find anything to satisfy his suspicion. Then the bureau, but that was even less satisfactory.

"Begorra, it is dhe thrunk must tell dhe tale," he inferred. "But how am Oi to get into it?"

He scratched his carrot-colored head.

"Vhat of d'em keys py der vashstand on?" intimated Pretzel.

"Begorra, ye have it!" averred Paddy, the instant he looked. "Dhat is plain enough United States for anybody, Pretzel! Now we have it!"

Pretzel had made the discovery of a ring of keys lying on the washstand, and in a moment Paddy had them in hand and was fitting them to the lock of the trunk, one after another.

In a few seconds he had found the right one.

"Now fur it!" he cried, as the lock turned, and he threw up the lid of the trunk. "It is now or never, begorra!"

"Golly!" warned Pomp, at that moment, "she am comin' back, Paddy!"

"Dhen she'll ketch us, begob!"

"She peen not runnin'," informed Pretzel.

Paddy was making all haste in his examination of the contents of the trunk, and in another moment an exclamation escaped him.

"We have it! we have it!" he almost shouted. "By dhe bones av ould Saint Pat, my guess was roight! Two minutes more, and, begorra, dhe whole case will be our own, and ditto dhe two t'ousand dollars!"

Snatching some garments out of the trunk, he pressed down the rest and closed the lid and locked the trunk in a hurry. That done, he grabbed up the mentioned garments, rolled them into a compact bundle and put them under his arm, and then, replacing the keys on the stand, he hastened from the room.

The others followed, closing the door after them, and they had barely descended the stairs and made their exit by the rear way when the woman entered at the front door. It had been a close call for them, but a miss was as good as a mile, in that case, as the saying goes. They did not run, once outside, but walked in a quick manner to the shanty of Mother Goose.

There Big Bill was awaiting them.

"What luck?" he asked at once.

"Dhe best av luck!" asserted Paddy, flinging down the clothes he had under his arm. "Mother Goose, d'ye recognize thim togs?"

It was a suit of male attire—coat, vest and trousers, of rich cloth and rather fancy make-up, being set off with numerous fancy buttons, one of which, by the way, was missing.

"Aa guess laak aa do!" the Swedish woman drawled, in her peculiar vernacular. "It is the saam klaas thaata maan had aan thaata Aa saw tha other daay."

"Are ye sure av dhat?" urged Paddy.

"Aa can swaar to it."

"Good enough! Dhat settles dhe biz, dhen! It was Silver Sallie dhat jammed dhe sticker into Miss Laura; but what she done it for is dhe greatest puzzle of all."

"Ve moost find dhat oudt," assumed Pretzel.

"Yo' bet yo' hat!" from Pomp.

"Let's go straight to the mine and see the bosses!" suggested Big Bill. "I opine they will know what to do."

"Oi reckon Granebough will know dhat he owes mesel' and me pards two t'ousand dollars, anyhow," announced Paddy. "Come along wi'd ye, pards, and av we don't make a whoop in dhe camp it will be funny!"

To the mines they hastened, by a rear

way, so as not to be seen from the hotel, and there found Mr. Greenbough and Cutter.

Paddy rattled off the story. "Can it be possible!" cried Mr. Greenbough, when he had heard all. "It is hardly credible, and yet, there can be no room for doubt. Silver Sallie is the one who tried to kill my child; but—why?"

A question that could not be answered. "She must be arrested at once," decided Cutter. "Now that we know who it is that threatens the life of Laura, we must take the proper steps in the matter."

To the hotel they hastened, and to the room occupied by the young woman, where they found—Silver Sallie lying dead on the floor. A note in her hand said that she had taken her own life by poison.

There was also a written confession, brief and hastily penciled. With all hope gone, with the fact known that she was guilty of the attempt upon Laura Greenbough's life, she had nothing to live for. She said, over her signature, that it was she who had attempted the assassination.

She did not state the reason, but Laura supplied that. Silver Sallie, she stated, had wanted to marry her—strange, yes, but not the first case of the kind, by any means. Her plan was to don male attire, marry Laura, and they to live together as man and wife all their lives, happy in each other's love. Naturally, Laura had objected to the irrational scheme.

The time of the wedding between Laura and Edwin Cutter drawing near, Silver Sallie, in a degree insane, determined to murder the object of her unnatural affection, and so made the attempt. Seeing Sid Sullivan come toward the house, and then turn toward his shanty, the thought came to her to put the crime on him, if she could, and every circumstance seemed to fall in line with her mad design. As to Plug Seely, he had told a whole-cloth lie.

Cutter proposed three cheers for the three quaint pards of Poker Pocket, and the cheers were given with a will.

And so ended one of the strangest cases ever recorded.

The reward was paid over to Paddy, Pomp and Pretzel, Mr. Greenbough kindly dividing it equally among them, and three happier boys never were seen.

The body of the misguided girl sport was buried with due respect, and her offense forgiven.

In due time there was a wedding, and Laura became the happy bride of Edwin Cutter. The bride prevailed upon her father to make Sid Sullivan comfortable for life, by giving him a certain amount monthly out of the profits of the Sullivan's Snap.

Plug Seely found it good for his health to "vamoose" as speedily as possible on being freed from jail. Big Bill Crawford was promoted to a good-paying position in the mines.

So we take leave of them, and as we take our departure, at the close of a charming summer day, and wend our way up out of the Pocket, just as darkness is closing down, and glance back at the peacefully flowing stream in the bottom of the gulch, and catch the gold of the departing sun upon the mountain tips, a rich voice breaks faintly upon the ear in a verse of Heine's beautiful poem—

"Die Luft ist kuhl und es dunkelt,
Und ruhig fließt der Rhein;
Der Gipfel des Berges funkelt,
Im Abendsonnenschein—"

The abrupt ending suggests that Pompey Sunflower has taken a hand in the matter, no doubt commanding Pretzel to sing it in United States or not at all!

THE END.

Paddy's Trump Card.

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